

Following Sarah

by Rich Espey

A full-length drama in one continuous act

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Following Sarah

Following Sarah is a play about young women coming to terms with the death of a schoolmate. Sarah Gardner won the State Cross Country championship last season and immediately jumped off a bridge to her death. Nearly a year later, her three surviving teammates Maddy, Julia and Kat, who still attend Thwaite Academy, a boarding school full of high achievers, receive an email from Sarah at the start of their Senior season. Still deep in school-sponsored denial about Sarah's suicide, the three survivors refuse to discuss or view this chilling intrusion. Instead, they each pursue more strongly the self-destructive paths they first embarked upon when they failed to accept Sarah's suicide. Kenya, a new student who's been housed in Sarah's former room, starts probing for information about the mysterious Sarah and consequently forces the three survivors to each begin a journey towards acceptance. Maddy, Julia and Kat each eventually manage to open Sarah's email, acknowledge the truth, reveal their fear and guilt, and ultimately correct their behaviors and successfully mourn the loss of their friend.

CHARACTERS

5F, 1M

Sarah Gardner, 18, white, star runner, the image of perfection, quietly anxious, doesn't talk much and appears in flashbacks.

Julia Goldblatt, 18, Chinese by birth, adopted by a white single mother, thinks she needs to lose 15 pounds, throws Elizabethan language into everyday conversations, rather snarky and witty.

Maddy White, 18, white, high-strung, overachiever, overdosing on ADD medication to get an edge on schoolwork and hallucinating as a result.

Kat Winner, 18, white, shameless self-promoter with her own website displaying all her achievements, obsessed with winning the State title, deeper in denial than anyone else about Sarah and less in touch with her feelings at the start than the others.

Kenya Hopewell, 17, African-American, new to Thwaite Academy and the private school world, desperately homesick and struggling to fit in, quick to anger.

Coach Wagner/Eyewitness/Male Birth Parent/High Performance Shoe/Moth Larva/Mr. Gardner, 40's, a single male character who appears to each young woman in a different form.

SETTING

Late Summer and Early Autumn, Thwaite Academy

"Oh, I know when we stand before a helpless Doom how hard it is to bear."

--Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, ll. 1369-70.

"The real destroyer of our happiness is always there within us...So long as the enemy is there, and so long as we are under its control, there can be no permanent happiness."

--His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Style note: *Italicized sections* within speeches are meant to represent the voices of the students' parents. Each of the four young women shares with us conversations with one of her parents.

Following Sarah

(Orange-gold rays of late summer light illuminate the inside of two elevated Juliet Balconies (railings in front of a set of French doors which open inward above the stage). We hear a mixture of cicadas and crickets; summer is giving way to autumn.)

(In shadows, COACH WAGNER, 40, in coaching shirt holds a stopwatch. SARAH, 18, white, with a ponytail, is dressed in a Cross Country uniform.)

COACH WAGNER

This is your moment. This is your day. This is your life.

(A starting pistol is fired. SARAH runs.)

SARAH

Every race has three parts.

(Somewhere else, KAT, 18, tall, white, athletic, powerful and dressed for running, is there, stretching.)

KAT

Seventeen fifty-seven.

COACH WAGNER

Run smart, Sarah!

SARAH

You run the first third of any race with your head.

(Somewhere else, MADDY, 18, shorter than KAT, white, thin, dressed in running shorts and a T-shirt, is also there, stretching.)

MADDY

Nine weeks. Sixty-three days. Fifteen hundred and twelve hours.

COACH WAGNER

Perfect, Sarah! Right where you want to be.

SARAH

You run the middle third with your legs.

(Somewhere else, JULIA, 18, Asian-American, not thin, also dressed to run, is there, stretching, sort of.)

JULIA

Fifteen pounds.

COACH WAGNER

There's my girl! One more, Sarah!

SARAH

You run the final third with your heart.

(Somewhere else, KENYA, 17, African-American, athletic looking, is there, stretching.)

KENYA

Three miles? Three? Are y'all kidding me?

COACH WAGNER

Yeah!!!!!! Yeah!!!!!!!!!! All right Sarah!!!!!!!!!!

(SARAH stops running.)

SARAH

Seventeen fifty-eight. Impressive.

KAT

I will run Seventeen fifty-seven.

SARAH
State Champion. My picture all over the place. Impressive.

JULIA
Just fifteen little pounds.

SARAH
Forty-seven weeks to the first meet of my soon-to-be
impressive college career.

MADDY
Only nine weeks to the end of the season.

SARAH
The fastest in the state at three point one miles.
Impressive.

KENYA
Three miles? Anything longer than 800 and I puke!

COACH WAGNER
The most impressive runner I've ever coached.

(SARAH begins running.)

SARAH
Important.

KAT
And all those Admissions officers will see my tweet at the
finish line - "Kat Winner sets the new State record in 17:57."

SARAH
Important.

MADDY
*"Oh, Maddy! Another Varsity letter and you'll be the well-
rounded girl we always hoped for!"* Just nine weeks.

SARAH
Important!

JULIA
*"Just fifteen, Julia, and I'll get you the eyelid surgery -
and you'll be beautiful!"* Really, Joanne?

SARAH
IMPORTANT!!

KENYA
*"You damn well better hightail it through the woods for three
miles with those skinny white girls if you want to fit in,
Miss Kenya Hopewell!"* Thanks, Mama.

SARAH

Important.

(SARAH stops running. She takes out a phone and presses a button. She appears to climb. She appears to spread her arms as if she is going to fly. She appears to leap. She disappears. COACH WAGNER disappears.)

(KAT looks at her phone.)

KAT

Oh my God. Oh. My. God!

(JULIA looks at her phone.)

JULIA

Big Stinky! Is this somebody's idea of a joke?

(MADDY looks at her phone.)

MADDY

I really, really, really hope this is one of my hallucinations.

(KENYA looks at the three of them.)

KENYA

I just hope I don't puke.

(JULIA's dorm room at Thwaite Academy. Blue fluorescent institutional lighting and just a little bad furniture inside one of the Juliet balconies. KAT and JULIA are there. JULIA is unpacking. She is no longer wearing running clothes, but KAT is.)

KAT

Wait, Steffie got kicked out? When?

JULIA

Last week. They clean the mattresses right before we all come back, and they turn the one Steffie had last year and her stash falls out. And so get this - Miz Jeffries calls her up and Steffie tells Miz Jeffries it's mine.

KAT

Shut up!

JULIA

So Miz Jeffries calls my adoptive mother.

KAT

Joanne must have freaked.

JULIA

I was like "Joanne, give me the phone" and I said "Miz Jeffries, I'm on partial financial assistance. If I had a stash at school do you think I would forget to take it home with me over the summer? Steffie Miller is rolling in it. She can afford to be careless with her stash." And Miz Jeffries is like, "Why would she say that? She's your best friend." And I'm like, "Not anymore." The bitch.

KAT

So does that mean you guys aren't...

JULIA

Be gone with her! Other fish on the playground.

KAT

So you're getting a new girl.

JULIA

Obviously.

KAT

I mean as a roommate.

JULIA

Once again Kat Winner's powers of observation stun the crowd! Shall we post this revelation to AdmitKat.Com? Joanne is highly impressed with your website, by the by.

KAT

Whatever. My father made me take down the video of State. *It's crass, Kat. They know you finished fifth without the video.*

JULIA

All that hullabaloo.

KAT

(looking at the
unoccupied "bed")

Do you know if they change out the mattresses...or if they just clean them?

(SARAH enters the room, lingers for
a while, then leaves.)

JULIA

They just clean them. I asked.

KAT

I would be so freaked out if I had gotten this room.

JULIA
Figures they'd give it to me.

KAT
Did you run much this summer?

JULIA
Why, do I look fat?

KAT
Are you ready for the season, is all.

JULIA
I suppose you ran every day.

KAT
Coach Wagner always -

JULIA
Coach Wagner's gone.

KAT
I'm well aware -

JULIA
I wonder where he is?

KAT
I got an email -

JULIA
You too?

KAT
From Coach Wagner.

JULIA
Oh, Coach Wagner.

KAT
Who did you think -

JULIA
Never mind.

KAT
He didn't say what he was doing. Just wished me luck. And then they closed his Thwaite email so that was that.

JULIA
Miz Jeffries doth claim he resigned.

KAT
Well, of course he did. Wouldn't you?

JULIA

Coaches who win State don't resign.

KAT

The new coach seems nice. You'll like her. She's youngish. But she knows what she's doing.

JULIA

Uh huh.

KAT

She's letting me do captain's practice on Wednesdays. She's got a good sense of humor. I'm pretty sure she's a lesbian.

JULIA

Does she have four wheel drive and cruise control and a plush leather interior? I'm not running, Kat.

KAT

You were doing so great at the end of last season.

JULIA

I've got college apps.

KAT

So do I.

JULIA

My grades need to be way better.

KAT

They'll wonder why you quit.

JULIA

Miz Jeffries asked "was the State meet what drove you to drugs?" Gawd.

KAT

Julia, there's only me, you and Maddy left.

JULIA

I'm sure there'll be some eager freshmen.

KAT

Who may drop out, get injured...Come on, how incredibly embarrassing would it be if the State champions couldn't even defend with a full team of five?

JULIA

Please don't tell me you forgot I was seventh on the team.

KAT

This year you'll be third or fourth. Colleges will love you -

JULIA

Those places actually count in the team score. Sixth and seventh don't count. What was Jess's place at State last year?

KAT

Twenty-fourth.

JULIA

Kat, I was two hundred and thirty-fifth. And I smoked more cigarettes than I ran miles this summer. Our team is not going to win State again if I'm one of our top five girls.

KAT

I know our team won't State. But I can be first at State. And I can't run in the State meet unless I'm part of a full team of at least five.

JULIA

It hurts too much.

KAT

No pain, no -

JULIA

I'm not talking about that.

KAT

Those counselors said -

JULIA

They were clueless.

KAT

You'll feel better.

JULIA

You sound like Joanne.

KAT

As a tribute then.

JULIA

Wait, our tribute was going to be some sort of vlog or something, wasn't it? You said you'd set it up.

KAT

I will set it up. I will.

JULIA

Not that you should even have to. The school should do it!

KAT

Julia -

JULIA

And I told Miz Jeffries when she falsely accused me of being a stoner that no, I was not, thank you very much, but if I was it was her fault because Thwaite Academy didn't do a damn thing after Sarah Gardner -

KAT

You did not!

JULIA

No. I did not.

KAT

I'm looking at this season as my tribute. Please, Julia? You looked so beautiful at the end of last season.

JULIA

Set up the online memorial, the vlog or whatever it is. And I'll consider it.

(KENYA is there, in dressy clothes, with some luggage. Her hair is not in a pony tail. She wears large hoop earrings.)

KENYA

Excuse me, is this 502? Well, obviously it is. Miz Jeffries said I'm in here. My name is Kenya Hopewell. I let people laugh at my name the first time they hear it and then that is it!

JULIA

Hey. I'm Julia. I sort of took this bed. But I don't really care.

KENYA

The other one's fine. But...

KAT

Oh, I'm in the other room.

KENYA

I can't believe I gotta walk up to the fifth floor! There's no elevator?

KAT

There are only two rooms up here and they're for seniors. Are you -

KENYA

I'm a junior. But Miz Jeffries said this was the only room left.

JULIA

Thanks, Steffie.

KENYA

She said this room would be good conditioning for a runner.

KAT

Wait, do you run Cross Country? The Coach said there was a Kenya -

KENYA

It must be the other Kenya. Just kidding. My thing is Track. 200 is my specialty. When I get an inside lane I burn that curve so they hear me coming and I got the sweetest lean at the end -

KAT

That's Spring. What about Fall?

KENYA

The letter said, "We invite you to consider our Cross Country program - "

KAT

We need you out there. Cross Country's killer.

KENYA

What killer?

KAT

We-won-State-last-year killer. I'm Kat. The captain.

KENYA

I don't know -

KAT

There's a boys' school two miles down the road. We run there a couple of times a week and work out with their team.

JULIA

Yippee.

KAT

A fall sport is a great way to fit in.

KENYA

So I've been told.

KAT

We're meeting at the Gym at 6:30 for a four.

KENYA

Four?

KAT

Miles? You do run, right?

KENYA

I mean...is four all y'all are doing?

KAT

Eat light. And make sure Julia's there. Oh, and during meets, we wear these ribbons - Thwaite green and gold - so try to grow your hair out or something.

(KAT is gone.)

KENYA

So...wait are you really...Julia Goldblatt?

JULIA

Uh huh. Why?

KENYA

You just don't look like I expected a Julia Goldblatt to look.

JULIA

I'm adopted. From China. Joanne went and got me for a 40th birthday present for herself. *I go all the way to China for you, the least you can do is practice your cello.* Where are you from?

KENYA

New York.

JULIA

Me too. 73rd and Broadway. You?

KENYA

Your picture's on the website. With a cello.

JULIA

Impressive. My lady doth do her homework.

KENYA

I memorized that website so I would be ready. "The oldest continuously operating girls' boarding school southwest of the Connecticut River."

JULIA

Uh huh. Well, your picture will be up there in short order, too, I'm sure. We're part of their Diversity kick. All ten of us. So how did you hear about Thwaite?

KENYA

Is Thwaite a secret?

JULIA

I just meant -

KENYA

It looked like there were a lot of girls of color. They said -

JULIA

It does look like that, doesn't it? I'm Jewish, too, so I count double. And I'm a lesbian, but they don't count that. They'd rather not hear about that. Yay, diversity!

KENYA

Why are you angry?

JULIA

Why are you scared? Don't worry. You're not my type. You're completely safe in that bed. Oh, but there is one thing about that bed that you should know. About Sarah Gardner. Do you know about Sarah Gardner?

KENYA

Did I miss that?

JULIA

They didn't put that on the website. Sarah Gardner was the best Cross Country runner in the history of Thwaite Academy. Sarah Gardner was one of the best Cross Country runners in the history of this state. And Sarah died right after winning the State meet last year. And that was her bed.

(SARAH is there, lingers, and leaves.
A few more leaves fall from near
the Juliet balconies. MADDY and
KAT are in their room across the
hall. MADDY is still in her running
clothes and is rocking back and
forth looking at her phone. KAT is
unpacking.)

KAT

I met Julia's roommate. Kenya or something. She looks fast. We're running at 6:30. Oh, and tell Julia how good she looked at the end of last season. We can recruit freshmen tonight after...what's the matter with you?

MADDY

(picking at her skin)

AAAAAAAAAAGGGGGGGGGGHHHHHH!! OK, I'm definitely gonna have a nightmare tonight so I'm just apologizing in advance. I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry.

KAT

School hasn't even started yet.

MADDY
(handing KAT her phone.)
Look. So I'm not imagining it?

KAT
Wait, Maddy, are you still taking those pills? That's gonna completely screw up your running -

MADDY
It's not the pills! It's THAT!

KAT
(overlapping)
And there's nothing to study yet!

MADDY
Did you get one, too?

KAT
No.

MADDY
Oh God, Oh God, Oh God!

KAT
Are you gonna open it?

MADDY
No! Maybe. I don't know.

KAT
It's probably some joke. Some sick joke. Someone pretending -

MADDY
It's from her school account. Sarahgardner at Thwaite dot net. Subject: Important. So someone would have had to hack in -

KAT
Jess! Jess was so pissed at us...and even though she left she could still -

MADDY
Jess wasn't pissed at me.

KAT
Well, I just meant -

MADDY
Not even Jess would do that. And why me? I mean, you didn't get one. Did Julia say anything?

KAT
No.

MADDY

God! Why does the most important year of my life have to start out this way??!! First they stick me up here on the fifth floor and now this!

(MADDY rocks and picks at her skin and takes a pill.)

KAT

If you're freaked out you shouldn't be taking stimulants!

MADDY

I want to get going on my Science project. If I work all night on it I won't have to think about this! My father -

KAT

Dead people can not send email!

MADDY

I'm not a complete whack job, Kat. She obviously scheduled it to be sent today. Maybe she figured she'd be off at college and was thinking about us being stressed at the start of our Senior year. Or maybe she knew how much of a let down it would be to come back and know that we could never win State again, not without her and Lindsay and Amber, and she wanted to cheer us up and take care of it when she was thinking about it. Remember how busy she was then? All the interviews and the recruiters and her personal trainers and all that? And her Dad! My God, her Dad...Of course she had to do things ahead of time, of course she did! It makes perfect sense!

KAT

So then open it. See what she had to say. "Run hard, girls!" "You don't have to be in the lead if you have the courage to come from behind!" "Stressed is just desserts spelled backwards!" Do you think it's something like that?

MADDY

I wish!

KAT

Wrong! Because Sarah never did anything like that! You're the one who writes little inspirational quotations on foot-shaped pink paper cutouts you stay up to three to decorate and tape on everyone's door. Not Sarah! Sarah might have something left to say but it is definitely not an inspirational quotation to be copied in Maddy White's team memory book. But open it and prove me wrong.

MADDY

Oh God, Kat, what if it's her note?

KAT

It was an accident.

MADDY

We drove by there. On the way in today. Dad, can you please take the next exit? But he took Bishop Road. *Maddy, you have to face it-*

KAT

People post complete bullshit on line.

MADDY

There's a chain link fence there! You can't fall.

KAT

That was almost a year ago. They probably put the fence up after what happened.

MADDY

It didn't look new.

KAT

All those ridiculous posts about her -

MADDY

I think I'm gonna pass out.

KAT

Did you eat today?

MADDY

Yes.

KAT

What did you eat?

MADDY

A cookie and a bean. What??!! Carb, protein and fat, just like Coach Wagner -

KAT

Maddy...

MADDY

Look, I can't open it and I can't not open it.

KAT

We're going to eat a real dinner. And then do four miles easy. We'll get to know Keena or whatever and tell Julia how great she looked at the end of last season and -

MADDY

I'm not sure...I'm not sure I want to run.

KAT

It's an easy four. Ten minute pace. We'll do Muddy Creek.

MADDY

Not the place with those dangling worms!!

KAT

Or we can run down to Wroxeter. You can see Tyler's new buzzcut. He thinks he looks hot, but honestly -

MADDY

I don't want to -

KAT

Zach Porter? Come on, Maddy! Zach Porter??

MADDY

I'm not sure I want to run this year. I think.

KAT

God, you and Julia are such wimps!

MADDY

Julia's quitting, too?

KAT

No, she is not. And neither are you. Look, you can't study all the time, well, YOU can, but you shouldn't study all the time and you sleep better when you're running -

MADDY

I'll run, I just don't want to compete.

KAT

"I run for fun" doesn't work on a college resume.

MADDY

But my project's about moths and their flight patterns, so I have to stay up late at night -

KAT

What about your parents?

MADDY

I thought YOU would understand.

KAT

I have been killing myself to get to 17:57! And I will get there. And all you have to do is run three miles. As slow as you want. Just so I can run my three miles in 17:57.

MADDY

You only need four other girls.

KAT

I'm doing it for her.

MADDY

If I didn't run, would you hate me?

KAT

Oh, Maddy -

MADDY

Seriously, Kat! If I didn't run, and that meant we didn't have a full team, would you hate me?

KAT

(long pause) No.

MADDY

Oh God.

KAT

What now?

MADDY

Your eyebrows. Your eyebrows hate me.

KAT

For God's sake, Maddy, don't flip out on me. We'll barely have five as it is.

(KAT checks her phone.)

KAT

Oh wow.

MADDY

What? Is it - ?

KAT

From Miz Jeffries. We're hosting a meet in six weeks. The Sarah Gardner Memorial Meet. Her parents will be here. And she wants to know what the team has done as our memorial for Sarah.

MADDY

Oh right. That.

(JULIA is there with her phone.)

JULIA

Did you see this?

MADDY

Oh my God...What?

JULIA

From Miz Jeffries.

MADDY

Oh.

KAT

I told you, I will set it up.

MADDY

Wait, do we have to make videos? I hate talking in public.

JULIA

Friends! Thwaitelings! Countrywomen! I come to bury Sarah, not to -

MADDY

I really thought you'd be done with the sick jokes by now!

KAT

Videos *and* text, OK. Don't freak out.

JULIA

And Kat, you can link it to AdmitKat.com, and admissions officers can be impressed by both your technological acumen and your empathy.

KAT

Let's just eat. And then run.

JULIA

I'm not running a step until it's up and running.

KAT

It'll take me fifteen minutes. I'll find you in the dining room.

(A few more leaves fall. The four girls each take out their phones. KAT works hers intently. JULIA takes a video of herself. MADDY texts into hers. KENYA speaks into hers.)

MADDY

What should I say? She was...nice.

JULIA

She was...really nice.

KAT

She was a great captain.

KENYA

Mama, I gotta sleep in some dead girl's bed! *Baby, that's called hazing. Probably all a big joke.*

MADDY

She was so smart, too.

JULIA

She was really great at the flute.

KAT

She worked really hard in practice.

KENYA

(texting into her phone)

Search. "Sarah Gardner" "Thwaite Academy".

(SARAH is there.)

SARAH

Search images. "Sarah Gardner". "Thwaite Academy".

MADDY

She was really...quiet.

JULIA

She had well-behaved hair. Beautiful hair.

KAT

She worked harder than anyone.

KENYA

"High School Champion falls from bridge moments after winning crown."

SARAH

Image: Sarah Gardner winning the State Championship Cross Country Meet.

MADDY

She...was a good listener.

KAT

Even when she wasn't feeling great she was always there.

JULIA

She thought a lot. You could tell she was thinking. A lot.

KENYA

"Victory turned into tragedy as the winner of the girls' state Cross Country championship fell to her death from a highway overpass just moments after winning the coveted trophy."

SARAH

Image: Sarah Gardner showing her gold medal from the West River Invitational earlier that season.

MADDY

It's kind of scary how dedicated she was. Freaky, even.

KAT

You damn well better work hard when your parents buy you your own private coach.

JULIA

Who knew that her talents extended to sending posthumous emails?

KENYA

"Gardner was a top student and was being aggressively recruited by the nation's most prestigious running programs."

SARAH

Image: Sarah on Spring Break helping to build a house for the underprivileged.

MADDY

Sarah's someone you should model yourself after!

JULIA

All that talent, brains and looks. What a waste!

KAT

Just stay on track, Kat, and they will forget all about Sarah.

KENYA

"Officials were at a loss as to how the accident occurred."

SARAH

Image: Sarah Gardner, winning the Martha Thwaite Award for Overall Excellence, as only a junior.

MADDY

You could be just like Sarah!

JULIA

As beautiful as Sarah.

KAT

Better than Sarah.

KENYA

"Officials at Thwaite Academy have refused public comment quote out of respect to the family who wish to keep this matter private unquote."

SARAH

Image: Sarah at the beach. Photo by Dad.

MADDY

She was...nice.

JULIA

She was really...nice.

KAT

She was a great captain.

(SARAH notices something very small that dangles on a thread. She is transfixed by it. Then she is gone. A few more leaves fall. KAT and KENYA are there, dressed to run.)

KAT

Hey, Fartlek buddy!

KENYA

What did you say?

KAT

Fartlek? It means speed-play? We run hard then easy. Coach paired us up. We take turns choosing landmarks to run to. You're up.

KENYA

I don't know any landmarks here.

KAT

No, it's like we run hard to the end of the fence and then easy to the stop sign, like that.

KENYA

Look, I can't keep up with you. I don't know why she paired me up -

KAT

You don't have to keep up. You just push me on the hard parts and then catch up on the easy.

KENYA

None of this is easy.

KAT

It's not supposed to be. Coach thinks you'll be number two girl this year. And it's really important for number two to push number one.

KENYA

Is that what you did for Sarah last year?

KAT

Let's just run hard to the end of the fence.

(KAT and KENYA run hard. JULIA and MADDY are there, dressed to run.)

JULIA

Fartlek day. Yay.

MADDY

Do you want to pick first?

JULIA

Sure, why not. Let's go hard to that bush and easy back to the dorm.

MADDY

Oh, Julia!

JULIA

Oh, Maddy!

MADDY

You're not even trying.

JULIA

Like it even matters.

MADDY

We're supposed to push each other.

JULIA

Then I will gladly berate you if you need motivation. Go, sirrah! Be off with you! Faster, thou tardy-gaited gudgeon! Ooh! You should put that on one of your pink footie cut outs!

MADDY

Look, this year I'm fifth and I'm going to count in the points thing! You could even count, too, if one of the freshmen -

JULIA

Kat will see that her freshmen wannabes remain on pace, for they are clearly in her thrall. I'm a safe sixth.

MADDY

You were seventh last year and you still tried in practice.

JULIA

If you're so motivated then get going. Run hard to that distant hay bale and I'll catch up to you. Promise.

MADDY

I just don't want to embarrass myself in our first meet is all.

JULIA

Oh, yes, no more embarrassing moments at Cross Country meets. What would we ever do? Well, we'd best run.

(JULIA and MADDY run. KAT and KENYA
slow down to run easy.)

KAT

Good job.

KENYA

Thanks.

KAT

OK, your turn to pick.

KENYA

How long does she expect us to go? 'Cause I got a lot of
reading to do.

KAT

She told us. Fifty minutes then a two-mile cool down.

KENYA

I need to tell her I gotta go in.

KAT

We only -

KENYA

If I do all that I'm gonna be too tired to get my work done!

KAT

But we have to -

KENYA

The only thing I have to do is pass my classes. My mama said
that is my first priority.

KAT

Fifteen minutes.

KENYA

I can barely stay awake in Ivanhoe as it is.

KAT

You'll pass, trust me.

KENYA

How do you know?

KAT

Hard to the third telephone pole. Let's go.

KENYA

How do you know?!

KAT

Let's go!

(KAT and KENYA run hard. MADDY and
JULIA slow down to run even easier.)

MADDY

Your turn. OK, I'll pick. Again.

JULIA

No, actually, I will pick. Walk to the end of Muddy Creek
Trail.

MADDY

We just came from there. We're supposed to go out twenty-
five minutes and back twenty-five minutes.

JULIA

Doesn't going out ten and back twenty sound more civilized?

MADDY

Coach will -

JULIA

Screw Coach! Figuratively, I mean.

MADDY

She's trying.

JULIA

Yes, she's quite trying. Don't tell me you don't have a
buttload of work.

MADDY

Yeah, but -

JULIA

Then let's just go back. She'll never know.

MADDY

But -

JULIA

It's not like she gives a crap about us! She gets all moist
for Kat and her 17:57 and maybe even a little for Kenya, but
Maddy, why are we doing this? I mean there is no point!

MADDY

If you quit Kat will hate me.

JULIA

I'm not going to quit. I'm just going to do the minimum I have to do to get another Varsity letter to impress the hordes of people tracking my achievements - you hear that, Joanne?? - and then be done with it.

MADDY

You loved it last year.

JULIA

How many days left, Maddy?

MADDY

Fifty-three. Twelve hundred and seventy two hours.

JULIA

Exactly. Easy to Muddy Creek. Very easy.

MADDY

Does it have to be Muddy Creek? Those worms freak me out.

JULIA

Well unless you know a faster way back...

(JULIA and MADDY run a little. KAT and KENYA slow down to run easy.)

KAT

You don't need to lean at the end.

KENYA

Conditioned reflex.

KAT

It's not track.

KENYA

I know it's not track, OK!!

KAT

Sorry.

KENYA

Coach tells me that every day! I'm well aware that -

KAT

Chill!

KENYA

Maybe y'all are the ones who need to chill!

KAT

Oh? Who are "y'all", exactly?

KENYA

Look, I'm not used to all this. And my phone died, I mean really died so I haven't been able to talk to my Mama - my *mother* - for a couple of days...maybe I just need to focus on my work and wait for Track in the spring -

KAT

No. You've got to stay on the team. Seriously, you're really good. I'll help you. You can use my phone whenever. One more hard one. You can do it. You're so good.

(KAT and KENYA run hard. MADDY and JULIA are walking.)

MADDY

I Googled Coach Wagner. Nothing.

JULIA

A veil of silence. I wonder what he said to her at the end of the race.

MADDY

Julia -

JULIA

I mean he was probably the last person, don't you think?

MADDY

I was still running, as were you.

JULIA

Obviously. I just meant...Do you remember the van ride back?

MADDY

No. Not really.

JULIA

The trophy was sitting up there in the shotgun seat, next to him. And at one point he had to hit the brakes hard, and he put out his arm to keep the trophy from falling off the seat. The trophy! Maddy, what was the last thing you said to her?

(The four girls are gone. COACH WAGNER is there with a trophy. He holds it out for SARAH, who bypasses it as she runs past.)

(Some more leaves fall from the Juliet Balconies. MADDY studies in her room. KENYA storms into hers.)

MADDY

(singing as she studies)

Integral of sine x equals negative cosine x.

Integral of cosine x equals sine x.

Integral of tangent x equals negative log absolute cosine x plus log absolute secant x.

Integral of cotangent x equals log absolute sine x.

KENYA

Damn bitch!

(KENYA makes some noise so MADDY will hear her. When MADDY doesn't notice, KENYA makes more noise.)

KENYA

Damn bitch!

MADDY

I'm trying to do my science!

KENYA

I thought you had cramps.

MADDY

I do.

KENYA

No you don't.

MADDY

Excuse me?

KENYA

That's what I'm talking about. You skip practice 'cause you want to study and that's fine with Coach but I do one thing and she's all over me.

MADDY

Why aren't you at practice?

KENYA

'Cause I quit. I'm going home.

MADDY

Oh. I wish I could do that. No, I don't. Yes, I do.

KENYA

They got any cabs come out here?

MADDY

Wait, why did you quit? You're like second on the team.

KENYA

She won't let me wear my hoops.

MADDY

Coach Hill?

KENYA

My coach at Powell let me wear my hoops to practice.

MADDY

It's a state rule. No jewelry at meets. Your old coach should have -

KENYA

I know it's a rule at meets, but this is practice!

MADDY

That was track. This is Cross Country. Maybe she's worried you'll snag one on a branch in the woods and rip off a lobe.

KENYA

We used to pass my hoops instead of the baton in 4 by 1 practice sometimes, just to mix things up. Sahara to Tisha STICK! Tisha to LaKeisha STICK! LaKeisha to Kenya STICK! That was a fine team.

MADDY

Did you guys win a lot?

KENYA

Yeah.

MADDY

How'd you do at State?

KENYA

Sahara to Tisha STICK! Tisha to LaKeisha STICK! LaKeisha to Kenya fail.

MADDY

Oh no.

KENYA

Girl let go before I had my grasp.

MADDY

Oh my God. You must have felt -

KENYA

My girls don't even talk to me anymore.

MADDY

Because of a dropped baton?

KENYA

Because I'm here. How much does a cab cost to the train station?

MADDY

Everything. Thwaite's a golden ticket.

KENYA

Thanks, Mama.

MADDY

It'll be worth it.

KENYA

Is it worth losing three hours of sleep to Astrophysics?

MADDY

I took that last year. I could explain it -

KENYA

I get it! I'm not stupid. I just don't know how I can do all that and read 100 pages of Jane Austen and write a dialogue in Spanish and whatever else and run six miles a day and -

MADDY

You can't. That's the point. This is training for real life here. "The treadmill doth ever accelerate", as Julia would say.

KENYA

Yeah, why does she talk like she's from Robin Hood or whatever?

MADDY

They're trying to see who wants it the most. And if you want it badly enough...

KENYA

What?

MADDY

You find an edge.

(MADDY takes out some pills. She takes two. She offers one to KENYA.)

KENYA

Shit, if I wanted drugs I coulda stayed at Powell.

MADDY

They just help you focus. I can study harder, longer, smarter...and it sticks. My Dad prescribed them after...I had some focus issues after what happened to Sarah. My grades slipped -

KENYA

B plusses?

MADDY

It matters. And this helps. I did nine hours one weekend for European History last year like it was nothing. I aced it. And I can see patterns, connections. Some people say they're just good for staying up late, for cramming facts, but I get...insight.

KENYA

Like what?

MADDY

Like...OK...you know how like when you see a moth flying it looks really random?

KENYA

Uh huh.

MADDY

Well, it's not. Everyone thinks it's chaos, but there's a deep, complicated flight pattern. I know this because last spring when I was taking the pills I would watch them fly and I could sense their pattern and predict where they were going next and be right. Sometimes. But I'm getting better at it! It involves integrals; I need more calculus, but I'm getting there. I'm doing my Senior science project on that. No one's ever figured out moth flight patterns before, but if I can get it down perfectly, then I'll have done something amazing, something no one has ever done, something really, truly excellent. For once.

KENYA

I just want to pass Astronomy and Physics.

MADDY

You will.

KENYA

So...wait. Your father gives you these drugs?

MADDY

They are not DRUGS! My BROTHER is the one strung out on DRUGS, OK? And my sister only got into Huntington, and my parents have done EVERYTHING for me and this is the LEAST I can do to repay them!! I'm sorry...I just -

KENYA

Do you want to quit?

MADDY

What, the team?

KENYA

All of this.

MADDY

Quitting is the worst thing a person can do.

KENYA

I can think of lots worse things. One thing in particular.

MADDY

Don't make that assumption unless you've run three miles in another girl's shoes.

KENYA

Are you talking about...wait...her?

MADDY

Never mind.

KENYA

Did she take those pills, too?

MADDY

Just give it a rest.

KENYA

I've got to sleep in her bed! Y'all have a great time here. Can I use your phone to call a cab?

MADDY

It's like fifty dollars to the train station.

KENYA

Can I borrow twenty?

MADDY

I'm not gonna -

KENYA

Give me twenty...give me fifty bucks or... I'm a cut you! Don't you laugh at me!

MADDY

Your corrugator muscle! (*wrinkling her brow*) Totally contrived! No action in the supercillii. You're faking.

KENYA

My what?

MADDY

I know a lot about facial muscles from this AP Anatomy course I took over the summer. I probably know more about facial muscles than anybody ought to.

KENYA

You're whack.

MADDY

Yeah. Probably.

KENYA

Just give me twenty bucks. I'll send it to you when I get home.

MADDY

You really think your mother will give it to you?

(KENYA turns to leave.)

MADDY

Look, please don't go. You're the one thing here that doesn't remind me of Sarah. I got an email from her the day before school started.

KENYA

Damn. What did it say?

MADDY

I haven't opened it yet. I think maybe that's why I'm just a tiny bit tense. Please don't quit the team.

KENYA

I already did.

MADDY

Just tell her you reconsidered. Tell her you were overwrought. Tell her it was your period. Look, it works, trust me.

(KENYA laughs.)

MADDY

Good. I'll help you with Astro tonight if you want. I'm scared of heights so I don't like to get too close to the balcony, but I'll tell you what to look for. This time of year you can see Aquila, the eagle. It's brightest star is called...

KENYA

Wait I need to know this...Altair?

MADDY

Right. Altair. It means "flying one". Do you really think I'm whack?

KENYA

No.

MADDY

You don't?

KENYA

No.

MADDY

Your frontalis didn't twitch. Good. Very good.

(MADDY gets a text message.)

MADDY

It's Kat. Team photos right now in front of the Athletic Center. Let's go?

KENYA

I don't care what that coach says, I'm still practicing my lean.

(KENYA goes with MADDY. Some more leaves fall. KAT sets up a camera and appears to record herself. KENYA is in her room seated at JULIA's computer. She clicks.)

KENYA

Search. "Sarah Gardner" "Thwaite Academy".

KAT

Hey everyone. I'm Kat Winner, a senior at Thwaite Academy. So I set up this vlog so you can leave your memories of Sarah Gardner as like a tribute. You can post a video or just some text. Whatever. Personally, I'm dedicating my senior season to Sarah. 17:57. That's for you, Sarah. You were awesome.

(KAT is gone. JULIA is there.)

JULIA

She wrote some really great poems. I wish I could write one for her. But she was a better poet than I'll ever be.
"Death, that hath suck'd the honey of thy breath, hath had no power yet upon thy beauty"
That's Shakespeare, not me.

(JULIA is gone. MADDY is there, texting.)

MADDY

I know she was like so happy about her SAT's. I can't believe that would happen to someone with such great SAT's.

(MADDY is gone. KENYA does more clicking.)

KENYA

Obituary. "Sarah Gardner, 18, beloved daughter of James P. and Maria B...whatever...Online Condolence Book.

(SARAH is there.)

KENYA

"Such a tragedy. My heart goes out to the family."

SARAH

"So sad. Kids are under so much pressure these days."

KENYA

"People are saying such terrible things, but I have heard about stranger accidents than this one."

SARAH

"She was like eighty pounds. I almost ended up like her but thank God I got help."

KENYA

"I heard she was on steroids. That's why she was such a good runner. Well, what do you expect. It's the world we live in, right?"

SARAH

"She was probably pregnant with the coach's baby. That's how these things usually happen."

KENYA

Oh my goodness.

(The EYEWITNESS is there. He is in his 40's and wears contractor work clothes and heavy boots. SARAH behaves as he describes.)

EYEWITNESS

I felt like I needed to write this and put it out there, you know? Everybody's wondering what really happened, and was it an accident, and I figured I might be the only person who saw what I saw, so here goes. I'm driving north on 58 to go to a site. I fit pipe and I usually don't work Saturdays but they need to get this place done. And I'm almost up to the Bishop Road exit and I feel my right front tire go out. So I pull over to the ramp so I can work on it safe from traffic. And as I get out, I see this girl running across the bridge up ahead, the overpass. And I think it doesn't seem like a real nice place to run, and I know they got that state park just a mile or so down. Anyway I start jacking up the truck, and I notice that she's stopped on the bridge just looking out at the highway. Is she looking at me? So I wave. But she doesn't wave back. And then she starts climbing the chain link there. And it's about eight foot or so... What the...? And she gets to the top...and I can't believe this...she actually looks like she's balancing on the chain link. Standing straight up and motionless. That's gotta be impossible, no one can do that. And she stands there, for a good, oh, twenty, thirty seconds. And then...she lifts her arms up and...I know this is weird...but it was almost like she was trying to fly.

(SARAH is gone.)

EYEWITNESS

I was the one who called the cops. I found out later her name was Sarah Gardner. And there's all this stuff in the papers about how it might could have been an accident. I just believe in truth, you know? I'm sorry for the family and all, but the truth is the truth and the truth shall set you free. I thought about getting in touch with her parents so they could hear the truth from me. But I don't know if that's what they would want. So I figured I'd post this. Just put it out there, and if you know 'em then you can decide whether or not this is something they ought to know.

(THE EYEWITNESS is gone. JULIA approaches KENYA at the computer.)

JULIA

That's my computer!

KENYA

I know, I just -

JULIA

There are personal things on there.

KENYA

I didn't look at any of your stuff -

JULIA

I'm sorry you don't have your own, but get thee to the library!

KENYA

She did jump off that bridge! Why didn't you tell me?

JULIA

That's an Honor Code violation!

KENYA

Jumping? Or talking about it?

JULIA

You could be kicked out -

KENYA

Fine! Because I am not spending one more night in the bed of some girl who jumped off a bridge.

JULIA

Good luck getting a switch. Sarah's ghost up here on the ramparts moveth Miz Jeffries not.

KENYA

Then maybe I'll tell Miz Jeffries there's someone else I'm afraid of up here.

JULIA

Go ahead. And I'll tell her I want you out because I caught you breaking into my computer.

KENYA

I'm not gonna steal your stuff!

JULIA

And I'm not going to molest you!

KENYA

I just want to know what really happened.

JULIA

That makes two of us.

KENYA

I thought -

JULIA

It's complicated.

KENYA

So then what happened?

She jumped, obviously. **JULIA**

Why? **KENYA**

Hell if I know. **JULIA**

Was she crazy? **KENYA**

No more than the rest of us. **JULIA**

Depressed? **KENYA**

No more than the rest of us. **JULIA**

A perfectionist? **KENYA**

No more than...you get the idea. **JULIA**

Was she on drugs? Was she being bullied? Was her hair too short for the ribbon? **KENYA**

No, no and...No. Look, if you want to switch beds... **JULIA**

I want to get out of this room completely! **KENYA**

You've been here, what three weeks? You should be used to it. **JULIA**

Don't you want to get rid of me? I mean I did break into your computer and all. **KENYA**

To be perfectly honest, the thought of being alone in this room is repulsive. And you are rather a good conversationalist. What else did you see on my computer? **JULIA**

Nothing. Except your bucket list. **KENYA**

JULIA

Oh my God!

KENYA

It's wide open on your desktop. What's Asian Eye Surgery?

JULIA

I cannot believe you would -

KENYA

Does it make you look more like a white girl?

JULIA

No.

KENYA

Right.

JULIA

They just put a little crease in your eyelid to give your eyes more...flash, I don't know. God, why am I even telling you this -

KENYA

So you look more like a white girl.

JULIA

You know what, why don't we continue this conversation the next time you straighten your hair, OK?

KENYA

And number four on your list is meeting Taylor Lautner and Robert Pattinson?

JULIA

Either Taylor Lautner or Robert Pattinson. It doesn't matter which.

KENYA

I am sorry, but that is so white girl.

(KAT is there.)

KAT

I've got strawberry shortcake and our ribbons!

(KENYA and JULIA laugh.)

KAT

What's funny? Maddy wrote your names on them in paint pen. Maddy? Maddy, come on.

MADDY

I have to finish studying.

(MADDY sings her little song to herself as she rocks back and forth with her calculus book.)

MADDY

Integral of sine x equals negative cosine x.
Integral of cosine x equals sine x.
Integral of tangent x equals negative log absolute cosine x plus log absolute secant x.
Integral of cotangent x equals log absolute sine x.

KAT

(over the song)

You never finish studying! You know we have a team dessert the night before every meet.

MADDY

I'm not hungry.

KAT

Team spirit, Maddy! COME ON! CAKE! And bring the pink footie cutouts.

MADDY

Oh. Yeah. Those. I did them.

(MADDY enters the other room and drops the pink footie cutouts. She returns to her room.)

MADDY

I have a calc test on Wednesday.

KENYA

It's Friday night!

JULIA

Yes, it is. Friday night. Could my life be any more pathetic right now?

(KAT forcibly drags MADDY back into the room.)

KAT

Look, this isn't exactly my idea of a rockin' Friday night either but here we are, chicas. I just need two minutes of video to put on AdmitKat.com, so try to cheer up just a scosh, K? Oh. Speaking of uploads... we're on the school website. Awesome picture, Kenya.

(KAT passes her phone to KENYA.)

KENYA

Damn. That is a good picture.

JULIA

Oh, look Kenya. We're front and center. Shock me.

KAT

Julia, you look gorgeous in that picture. Here's your cake.

JULIA

I think not.

KAT

Oh, come on. I need video evidence of me being a good team captain, so just eat some cake and smile, will you? Two minutes. There's a good girl.

JULIA

I have goals, too, Kat.

KAT

Kenya, you can smile and eat a piece of cake, can't you?

KENYA

You think the school would have some sort of memorial about Sarah up there on the Cross Country page.

JULIA

You would think that, wouldn't you. But they have left that task to the children for some inexplicable.

MADDY

Oh my God that cake is freaking me out.

KAT

Someone just eat the damn cake!

KENYA

I'll eat the cake. Here, you can film me.

(KAT starts filming.)

KAT

So he we are the night before the first meet of the season. Team Spirit Dessert. Go Thwaite! So Kenya, what do you think of Thwaite so far?

KENYA

Awesome!! It's like, the, like, the most, like totally, like awesomest place, like, ever!

KAT

Great...

MADDY

Oh my God, please cover up that cake.

KAT

So here's your ribbons you guys. Everybody's name in Thwaite green and gold paint pen. Julia -

JULIA

Gosh, Kat, you sure are a thoughtful team captain. I'm sure many colleges are looking for that kind of outstanding leadership in their future students.

KAT

Maddy-

MADDY

Oh God, make it stop -

KAT

Kenya -

KENYA

What the hell am I supposed to do with this? Do you see a pony tail on my head?

KAT

God you guys, please, I don't mind editing but just give me something.

(KAT resumes taking video.)

KAT

So, here are our pink footie cutouts, so beautifully prepared by Maddy White. Julia, can you read yours?

JULIA

Why certainly, Katherine Palmer Winner, who got 2260 on her latest SAT's, I can. "Pain is only temporary. Glory is eternal." Deep.

KAT

So Kenya, what's your strategy for the meet tomorrow?

KENYA

Um, let's see, I think my strategy is to do my best, run the race, do my lean at the end and try to not jump off a bridge !!

JULIA

Jesus, Kenya!

KENYA

Well what kinda bullshit is this? "Pain is only temporary. Glory is eternal." Seems like Sarah thought it was the other way around! Or maybe I'll see it differently when my hair is long enough for the ribbon.

MADDY

Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God, get it off me. Get it off me!!

KAT

It's a ribbon, Maddy.

MADDY

AAAUUUGGHH!!! I hate worms! I hate worms!

KENYA

Damn, girl!

MADDY

They camouflage themselves in my calculus book, pretending to look like integral signs. I can handle them there. But not inside cake.

JULIA

It's a freakin' ribbon.

KAT

Maddy? Eat your cake. She doesn't eat when she takes those pills, her blood sugar gets low and she sees things. She'll be fine. Eat your cake and the worms will go back to the book, Maddy.

MADDY

Please don't make me eat strawberry shortcake, Kat!

KAT

You need to eat something, Maddy, this is ridiculous.

(KAT puts down the camera and forces
MADDY to eat.)

JULIA

Don't stop filming now. It's just getting good.

KENYA

Whole damn place is ridiculous.

KAT

Eat, Maddy. See? No worms. Just a ribbon.

(MADDY throws the cake down and sobs.)

KENYA

(to MADDY) There ain't no worms, girl!

JULIA

Give her a break.

KAT

Maddy, it'll be OK. It's OK.

MADDY

This is what we were doing the last time I ever talked to Sarah.

KENYA

You know what? One of you two needs to open up that email from her 'cause this is makin' all y'all crazy.

JULIA

One of who two?

KENYA

Either her or you, 'cause both of y'all are -

JULIA

YOU OPENED MY EMAIL??!!

KENYA

I didn't open it, open it! Maddy said she got this email and I wondered if you did, too.

MADDY

Oh my God, Julia, you got it, too? Wait, Kat, how come you didn't get it? Or did you?

JULIA

You said all you looked at was my bucket list!

KENYA

Your email was open, I just -

KAT

You don't have any right to tell us what to do.

JULIA

You got it, too?

MADDY

The day before school.

JULIA

Did you get it too, Kat?

KAT

No, but if I had I would realize it was spam. Or some sick joke. And it's not going to change the fact that Sarah is dead. She's dead, and that's that!

(KAT is gone.)

KENYA

You want my opinion you need to put "open that email and figure out what she's trying to say" at the top of your bucket list. All o' y'all.

(KENYA is gone.)

MADDY

I need to go study.

(MADDY is gone and JULIA is alone at night.)

JULIA

Julia Goldblatt's Kickass Bucket List, or The Road to Happiness in Twelve Easy Steps. One. Asian eyelid surgery. Two. Get on a reality show - doesn't matter which. Three. Play Elgar's Concerto in E minor perfectly- done. Four. Meet either Taylor Lautner or Robert Pattinson - doesn't matter which. Five. Vegas! - Done. Six. Spend summer roadtripping with Cosmic Charlie. Seven. Try Ecstasy or Shrooms - doesn't matter which. Eight. Lose ten pounds - done. Well, sort of. Eight point five. Lose fifteen more pounds. Nine. Get laid. Often. Either gender - doesn't matter which. Ten. Drink Cristal out of my girlfriend's pump on top of the Eiffel Tower on New Year's Eve. Eleven. Learn Buddhism. I mean REALLY learn it. Twelve. Find one of my birth parents - doesn't matter which.

(JULIA mimes playing the cello, and we hear the opening of Elgar's Cello Concerto in E minor, which continues to play underneath the following scene. MALE BIRTH PARENT, Chinese, 40's, appears.)

MALE BIRTH PARENT

I've missed your playing.

JULIA

You can't do it all.

MALE BIRTH PARENT

Yes, you are a very busy girl.

JULIA

I just took a little break. I got through the Elgar perfectly in June. I'm sending the recording out to colleges.

MALE BIRTH PARENT

When your sounds reach me, I wonder, did any of this come from me?

JULIA

I wonder if you really do hear me.

MALE BIRTH PARENT

The cello has quite a resonance. You made a good choice.

JULIA

Cello was Joanne's idea.

MALE BIRTH PARENT

And yet it gives you pleasure.

JULIA

Does it? I'm eight and Joanne and I are playing "Miss Mary Mac". It's an American thing, you wouldn't know it. Miss Mary Mac Mac Mac All dressed in black black black With silver buttons buttons buttons All down her back back back *Your calluses are gone. You haven't been practicing, have you?*

MALE BIRTH PARENT

Parents are regrettably flawed.

(The music has stopped.)

MALE BIRTH PARENT

Play more.

JULIA

I can't. It's gone. I work hard at things and then they just blow away like sand. Does that ever happen to you, Male Birth Parent? Like my Torah portion. All I remember now is it was about skin... *Namal basar orlah*...and you shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin...or some such. Blown away like sand. My Elgar, my Torah portion...my friend.

MALE BIRTH PARENT

She sent you something, I believe.

JULIA

Yes, she did.

MALE BIRTH PARENT

You should see what she has to say.

(SARAH is there.)

JULIA

We would play together, sometimes, right here. It was her room then. Me on the cello and her on the flute. She was very good. Of course. We're working on a Mozart duet one night.

(We hear some flute and cello music.)

SARAH

Can you believe Mozart wrote this when he was eight?

JULIA

They say his father pushed him.

SARAH

I wonder what he would have turned into if he'd just been left alone.

JULIA

Probably a nobody.

SARAH

And he died so young. Even if he'd died when he was our age he'd have still been famous.

JULIA

Two hundred works by the age of eighteen.

SARAH

I wonder if he ever thought, "I don't want to be a composer any more. I just want to try something else." What do you think his father would have done?

JULIA

I don't know what fathers do.

SARAH

Show me how to play your cello.

JULIA

Are you serious?

SARAH

I want to do something different.

JULIA

Oh God, it takes, like, years to not suck.

SARAH

I don't care if I suck! I WANT to suck! I want people to laugh at me, to roll their eyes, to turn away in horror...

(SARAH takes the "bow" and plays the "cello" and it sounds terrible.)

JULIA

That's really expensive! God, if anything happens to that Joanne will freak!

SARAH

I just wanted something different.

JULIA

Here. You place your legs like this...and hold the bow like so...and very gently...very lightly. Back and forth. Back and forth. See? You don't suck. You're amazing. Poor, poor Sarah, cursed with being unable to suck at anything.

(JULIA kisses SARAH. SARAH is gone.)

JULIA

That was the last time we talked. The next day was State. She was the whole reason I joined the team in the first place. Male birth parent, do you hate me because I'm a lesbian?

MALE BIRTH PARENT

No.

JULIA

Joanne doesn't either. We're all good with it. Everyone I know, in fact. But I wonder about Sarah. This memorial meet for her is in three weeks. We have this website, but it kinda sucks. I want to do something more.

MALE BIRTH PARENT

Offer a tribute.

JULIA

I guess me not sucking at the meet named after her would be a tribute.

MALE BIRTH PARENT

I thought you were running, such as it is, to lose weight so that your mother -

JULIA

Adoptive mother, thank you.

MALE BIRTH PARENT

So that Joanne would buy you Asian eyelid surgery.

JULIA

Would you hate me, Male Birth Parent, if I got the eyelid surgery?

MALE BIRTH PARENT

Why does it matter what I think? I'm not even real.

JULIA

I know. But would you?

MALE BIRTH PARENT

You have my eyes. And if you do get the eyelid surgery because you lost weight during Cross Country, then you can not say that you ran Cross Country as a tribute to Sarah. Sarah deserves her own tribute.

JULIA

She does.

(An image of a Tibetan sand mandala
appears.)

MALE BIRTH PARENT

The best tribute I ever saw was a mandala. A sand painting, crafted over days, for a fallen hero. The monks labored over it adding grain after grain of colored sand shaken ever so gently from the tips of metal funnels. An exquisite pattern of colors and harmony.

JULIA

I don't know how to do a mandala.

MALE BIRTH PARENT

"Learn Buddhism" is number eleven on your bucket list.

JULIA

Making a mandala is not the same as learning Buddhism.

MALE BIRTH PARENT

It's a start. You can buy a kit online. One-click ordering.

JULIA

They'd put it on the website, no doubt. I could show colleges -

MALE BIRTH PARENT

One thing about mandalas: when the work is complete, the colored sands are swept up and poured into a river, where the waters carry their healing energies throughout the world. The mandala does not last.

JULIA

Then what's the point?

MALE BIRTH PARENT

Oh look. You qualify for free shipping. And while you're clicking, open her email.

(JULIA does not.)

MALE BIRTH PARENT

To be truly alive we must accept pain. We must do more than accept it. We must seek it out, live with it and learn to not fear it.

JULIA

How do you know all these things, Male Birth Parent?

MALE BIRTH PARENT

I'm just a figment of your late adolescent imagination.

JULIA

Exactly.

MALE BIRTH PARENT

That quotation was on one of Maddy's pink foot cut outs. She gave it to each of you the night before State. You haven't thought about it since. Until now.

JULIA

Why didn't playing the Elgar perfectly feel good?

MALE BIRTH PARENT

Just keep playing. I'll hear it.

JULIA

What if I get through my bucket list and I'm still not happy?

(MALE BIRTH PARENT is gone. The four girls line up for their first Cross Country meet of the season.)

(OFFSTAGE VOICE: Runners take your marks!)

KENYA

These girls, Mama. They talk a lot about what she did but not about who she was. Everything here is "what did you get on that" or "how did you do on your whatever" or "did your team win".

KAT

The State meet was in Bishop Park last year. Just a few miles from Thwaite - we practice there all the time.

JULIA

It's a one-mile loop and you have to run it three times. The crowd sees you at the start, at one mile, at two miles and then at the finish.

MADDY

The rest of the time you're on a trail in the woods. Alone.

(OFFSTAGE VOICE: Set!)

KAT

Sarah and I ran the first mile together that day.

(COACH WAGNER and SARAH are there.
KAT, MADDY and JULIA relive last year's State Meet while running now.)

COACH WAGNER

First mile in five fifty-five. Kat is the rabbit; Sarah, you follow Kat.

KAT

Sarah could have gone way faster, but my job was to keep her to just under six minutes.

COACH WAGNER

You run the first mile with your head. Save something for the kick.

(A starting gun goes off. Crowds cheer.)

JULIA

I never saw her in meets after the gun went off, of course. Except at State. Which is completely unexpected.

MADDY

I see her take off, along with Kat and the other really talented girls. And I can't stop thinking about the night before. The last thing I said to her.

KENYA

I know she was the "best ever runner". And she was "straight A's and honor roll". And there's a picture of her on the website building a house for poor folks on Spring Break...in our neighborhood. But they won't talk about what's real.

JULIA

I follow her with my eyes as long as I can. Her pony tail bounces really softly on her neck. That Thwaite green and gold ribbon, disappearing into the woods.

KAT

Five fifty four split! And we're in first and second.

COACH WAGNER

Good job, girls! Perfect! Fly, Sarah!

KAT

And I back off. I can't do two sub-six miles, but she can. And I watch her go into the woods ahead of me, getting smaller and smaller. The girl from Wheeler passes me. And the one from Lassiter. Then the one from West River. But it's OK. No one else will. And Sarah's so far ahead at this point. I start counting points in my head. Sarah one, me five, Lindsay and Amber probably ten and twelve...awesome tiny numbers...if Jess can hang in there we're gonna win this.

KENYA

I could almost understand a girl doing what she did if she lost. But she won, Mama. My old coach told us in the ancient Olympics the runners used to say "the wreath or death". "The wreath or death." So why was she "the wreath and death"?

MADDY

The night before we did our traditional team dessert - these strawberry shortcake thingies with the premade spongy shells and strawberries and whipped cream - and she says to me

SARAH

Maddy, what would you think if I didn't win the race?

MADDY

You know with all that whipped cream and spongecake stuff in your mouth I swear I thought you said -

SARAH

Would it be OK with you if I didn't win tomorrow?

JULIA

My first mile my split is 8:57. The first time I ever break 9, uh huh, Joanne, uh huh! 8:57. Whoo!! And this coach from some other team way out in the country is yelling at her girl who's right next to me. "I didn't drive you all this way for you to run no nine minute mile!" And I look over at the girl, and her eyes just well up and start, like, projectile crying, right there, at the one mile split. And I think, "Why are we doing this?"

KAT

I hit the two mile at 12:32.

COACH WAGNER

All right, Kat! You're perfect! One more, one more!

KAT

And I go into the woods for mile three, and I'm still fifth. I can still see the West River girl but nobody else. Then all of a sudden I see Sarah. In the distance. She's just standing there, not moving. Oh God, she's hurt! The West River girl gives her a strange look as she passes. Sarah! Sarah!! I get closer. Sarah, what's wrong? And I get up to her...and she's just staring. What's the matter? What's wrong?

(SARAH does not respond. KAT takes a long moment.)

KAT

And then she starts running again. She just...she takes off. Faster than I have ever seen her. I mean the third mile is just so hard. Your legs burn, your lungs burn, everything hurts. You run the third mile with your heart.

KENYA

That lady from Thwaite, who came to our church last fall. Said she went there back in the day. And she talks about the dorms and the classes and the sports and the thing where they all dance around the Maypole or whatever and march in step like they've done for a hundred and whatever years, and Mama says *Sign me up!* But Mama, I don't want to go. *But baby, this is your future.* But Mama, they take us to a mall every Sunday and half the girls come back to the bus with a new pair of Jimmy Choo's and a Kate Spade over each arm and a new set of Dolce and Gabbanas propped up in their long blond hair like some sorta victory wreath -.

MADDY AND SARAH

"Would it be OK with you if I didn't win tomorrow?"

JULIA

I have cramps on the second mile, so I slow down a little. But I do not walk! And I'm almost at mile two and I hear this person coming up behind me so fast. Who's got that much left and why are they back here? And I look back, and it's Sarah, who I realize is on her third and final lap, running faster than I have ever seen her. She's lapped me. Oh my God, she's lapped me!!

KAT

You run the third part of any race with your heart.

JULIA

And she just blows past me. I just see her pony tail from behind. And a little river of sweat trickling down perfectly in between her shoulder blades. "Good job, Sarah!" She doesn't acknowledge me. At all. She must be really focused.

KENYA

The wreath or death. A new pair of Dolce and Gabbanas.

JULIA

At the end you veer right to the finish. I still have another mile lap, so I turn left back into the woods. I don't see her finish. But I hear the cheer. Even in the woods. It's really loud. Good job, Sarah.

KAT

And I get to the finish about two minutes after her. Fifth. Dad with the video. Lindsay tenth. Amber 13th. *I hope that's not unlucky - ha ha.* Come on Jess! Come on!! And Jess is twenty fourth. 1, 5, 10, 13, 24...Fifty-three points. Wheeler's fifth girl is 30th. They've got 62. Low score wins. We win. We win! We win STATE!! Coach Wagner, where's Sarah?

COACH WAGNER

She didn't stop. I guess...She's doing a cool down.

KAT

Why would she be doing a cool down without the rest of us?
She's gonna miss the trophy presentation!

MADDY AND SARAH

Would it be OK with you if I didn't win tomorrow?

JULIA

And it has occurred to me that I might have been the last person to say something to Sarah that she heard. "Good job, Sarah." And it occurs to me she might not have heard me.

(More leaves fall to the stage. The girls return to their rooms. JULIA has a large box, which she opens. It's the mandala kit, and she opens it and removes a book, chakpurs (sand funnels), sand vials and chalk, with which she begins drawing a pattern on the floor. MADDY and KAT are in their room. MADDY is trying to take video of something outside her window, and KAT ices and massages her legs, checks her phone and acts generally furious.)

KAT

Barely anyone's added anything to the website. And the only videos are the three of us. Did you email -

MADDY

Yes, I emailed them, all right?

KAT

Even Jess?

MADDY

Even Jess.

KAT

And?

MADDY

I assume they're too busy.

KAT

Oh yeah. Busy. That's why. Sure.

MADDY

Well I'M busy, OK?

KAT

At least you posted something. Even if it was three lines about her SAT's. God, Maddy, it's in two weeks. We can't just show thirty seconds of video. Of us!

(KENYA takes her comforter and pillow from her room into MADDY and KAT's.)

KENYA

I need to sleep on your floor.

KAT

What's wrong with your bed? Never mind.

KENYA

I think Julia's turning into a witch or something.

(JULIA finishes the chalk pattern and starts scraping a chakpur to slowly pile grains of colored sand onto the chalk outline. KAT reads from the memorial website on her phone.)

KAT

"There are things we are not meant to understand. This is one of them. Rest in Peace, Sarah."
"Your record will never be broken. You were a star on Earth, and now you're a star in Heaven."

KENYA

So I can sleep in here or what?

KAT

Fucking 19:13!

MADDY

You won the race!

KENYA

And I need help with my stars.

KAT

'Cause three crap schools were there! 19:13? I might as well be in a wheelchair.

MADDY

Why don't you just post a picture of your finish and photoshop in a clock that says 17:57?

KENYA

And I need help with the special theory of relativity.

KAT

Look, I'm not getting into college on butterflies, I'm getting in on 17:57.

MADDY

They are moths and I'm not getting in either if you don't shut up!

KENYA

Look, I gotta get away from Maid Marian and her chalk circle or whatever.

KAT

I did not get a hundred and eighty five dollar high performance shoes to run 19:13!

(KAT starts pounding on her shoes.)

MADDY

(to the moths)

Come over here! Come over here now!!

KENYA

Y'all are crazier than she is.

KAT

I'm going for a run.

MADDY

It's almost time for lights out!

(KAT puts on her shoes and is gone.)

KENYA

You said you would help me.

MADDY

I have to work on my science, too.

KENYA

What are you doing?

MADDY

I'm trying to film these moths so I can figure out their pattern but they're not cooperating!

KENYA

Are they supposed to?

MADDY

I only have a few weeks before my college essay is due! *Come on, Maddy, we know there's a star in there, just let 'er shine.*

(KAT runs through the darkness with
frightening intensity.)

KENYA

Well I got stars to memorize, but Miss Thing is too busy...

MADDY

You just wait until next year!

KENYA

I won't have a next year. If I fail this Astro test -

MADDY

You'll be fine.

KENYA

How do you know?

MADDY

You're all over the website!

(JULIA reads from her book as she
works on the mandala.)

JULIA

"After all, death is a part of life."

(KAT trips on a root and injures her
right foot. She takes off her right
shoe and hurls it into the woods.
She sits and rocks. Her HIGH
PERFORMANCE SHOE is there.)

HIGH PERFORMANCE SHOE

Hey, I cost a hundred and eighty five bucks!

KAT

Yeah, so how come I ran 19:13 at the last meet?

HIGH PERFORMANCE SHOE

I don't think Daddy wants you to be throwing away your high
performance shoes.

KAT

Some performance! And I only threw away one, so you're only
worth ninety-something bucks.

HIGH PERFORMANCE SHOE

Daddy can't buy you just one shoe, however.

KAT

Well fuck him, then!

JULIA

"There is nothing strange about death."

KENYA

If you're not gonna help then give me some of those pills.

MADDY

They won't do you any good.

KENYA

Why? 'Cause my hair's too short?

MADDY

They help you study what you already know. If you don't understand the special theory of relativity they won't help.

KENYA

You said they give you insight!

MADDY

I'm atypical!

KENYA

Damn right!

JULIA

"Sooner or later we all have to pass through that gate."

HIGH PERFORMANCE SHOE

Looks like you got a hitch in your git-along there, girl. You hurt?

KAT

NO! Maybe. I don't know. All right, YES! But probably not just then.

HIGH PERFORMANCE SHOE

But...

KAT

I probably have pretty serious stress fractures in my third and fourth metatarsals and YES I know I should probably go see the trainer and YES I know she'll tell me to go to the pool and swim -

HIGH PERFORMANCE SHOE

Videos of you doing laps for rehab won't get you that scholarship!

KAT

Exactly!

HIGH PERFORMANCE SHOE

See, I'm not so dumb for a shoe.

KAT

You sound more like my father.

JULIA

"At that time, whether or not there is life after, it is very valuable to have peace of mind."

KENYA

What'd you get in this class last year?

MADDY

A minus.

KENYA

You still got your tests?

MADDY

I'm not getting myself in trouble for you.

KENYA

Give me your test from last year or you'll be sorry.

MADDY

Wait, say that again.

KENYA

You heard me. What'd my eyebrows do? How about my frontalis muscle? My supercillii? You give me that test or you're gonna pay.

MADDY

I don't have it.

KENYA

You lie.

MADDY

I don't!

KENYA

You're not the only one who can read a face! Now are you gonna help me like you promised or not?

JULIA

"How can we achieve peace of mind at such a moment?"

(KAT tries to run. It hurts.)

KAT

God damn metatarsal bones!

HIGH PERFORMANCE SHOE

Shake it off.

KAT

This cannot be happening to me! I worked all summer...all YEAR!
FOUR years!

HIGH PERFORMANCE SHOE

Life happens, babe. No pain, no -

KAT

I am expected to win State, OK?

HIGH PERFORMANCE SHOE

Tough break. But your team won last year.

KAT

Don't you dare -

HIGH PERFORMANCE SHOE

Who cares about last year? What have you done for me lately,
am I right? Am I RIGHT?

KAT

RIGHT! And when I won I was going to stop running and SMILE
and accept the first place trophy with GRACE and GRATITUDE
instead of jumping off a BRIDGE and RUINING everything for
my so-called teammates who didn't even get a chance to
CELEBRATE! All that work, all those fucking drills and
practices and we didn't even get a minute to CELEBRATE!

HIGH PERFORMANCE SHOE

You hate her guts, don't you?

KAT

Passionately!

JULIA

"Peace of mind is possible only if we have some experience
in ourselves that will provide inner strength, because no
one else can provide this for us."

MADDY

Get out of my room. In fact, why don't you get out of this
school? You've done nothing but complain, you don't
appreciate any of the opportunity -

KENYA

The opportunity for what? To turn whack? I figure I'm about
two-thirds the way there, so maybe I better get out before
I'm a complete whack like the rest o' y'all.

MADDY

I am sorry about your situation and all, but you cannot possibly understand what it's like to come from where I come from, where most of us come from, and to understand that maybe if we get a little tiny bit stressed at times it's just because -

KENYA

People who are a little tiny bit stressed don't keep a dead girl's email unopened in their inbox for a month!

JULIA

"No one can provide this inner strength for us. No dieties, no gurus, and no friends."

(KAT tries to run again but can't.
She can barely walk.)

HIGH PERFORMANCE SHOE

Looks like it's laps in the pool for you, missy.

KAT

No way!

HIGH PERFORMANCE SHOE

But videos of you doing laps for rehab -

KAT

You said that already -

HIGH PERFORMANCE SHOE

Won't erase Sarah from your mind.

KAT

No one saw.

HIGH PERFORMANCE SHOE

Does that really matter?

KAT

I hit the two mile in 12:32. Coach seemed happy. I knew I was fifth. And I knew I could hang on to fifth. And a minute later I see this girl stopped, ahead of me. Wheeler? Lassiter? River Hill? ...Can I pass her? It's...Sarah? She's just standing there, not moving. Oh God, she's hurt! The West River girl gives her a strange look as she passes. Sarah! Sarah!! I get closer. Sarah, what's wrong? And I get up to her...and she's just staring. What's the matter? What's wrong?

(SARAH is there, staring at something.)

SARAH

Don't bother it. Don't hurt it.

MADDY

You're their project!

HIGH PERFORMANCE SHOE

You need to tell someone what happened.

KAT

No one else saw. That West River girl was already too far ahead, and anyway -

HIGH PERFORMANCE SHOE

You need to tell someone what you said.

KAT

It won't change anything.

HIGH PERFORMANCE SHOE

You need to -

KAT

You don't jump off a bridge because somebody yelled at you!

HIGH PERFORMANCE SHOE

Then why are you afraid to open her email?

JULIA

"This is why the Buddha says you must be your own master."

(KENYA grabs MADDY's phone.)

MADDY

No!

(KAT opens her email. JULIA opens her email. KENYA opens MADDY's email.)

MADDY

You have no right!

KENYA

It's a video.

MADDY

That is MINE!!

KENYA

It's just a video of...I don't know...It's like a worm or something. It's just...dangling there.

(As they all watch, a green worm,
larger than life so we can see it,
descends from above on a silken
thread. It's actually a geometer
moth larva, better known as an
inchworm.)

KENYA

It's an inchworm.

SARAH'S VOICE

Oh my God! This is so beautiful! Isn't this the awesomest
thing? It looks like it's just floating there!

(The larva inches up the thread and
disappears.)

KENYA

That's it. That's all there is.

KAT

It's the same kind of worm she was staring at.

JULIA

Subject: Important.

HIGH PERFORMANCE SHOE

How does it make you feel?

KAT

Like she jumped because of me.

(The HIGH PERFORMANCE SHOE is gone.)

MADDY

Oh my God. No. No, God, please, no!

KENYA

It's not a real worm, it's just a video!

MADDY

NO!! Get it off me!!

(MADDY runs away.)

KENYA

What about my test? You promised!!

(KAT limps barefoot back to her room carrying one shoe. KENYA stares at MADDY's phone for a long time. She taps its screen several times and pauses. She starts typing. Then she is gone. JULIA continues to work on the mandala. KAT arrives back at her room and starts banging the one remaining shoe against the floor. She starts smashing items in her room. Hearing the noise, JULIA stops working on the mandala and sees KAT in her tantrum.)

JULIA

Kat? Kat! KAT!! I have something I need your help with. Please. I need your help.

KAT

Oh God, Julia. I have to tell you something.

(KAT goes with JULIA to work on the mandala. More leaves fall. KENYA studies Astronomy while KAT and JULIA continue the mandala. KAT has her injured foot elevated.)

JULIA

So why do you think she stopped for an inchworm?

KAT

I don't know.

JULIA

She should have talked to someone, you know?

KAT

She did, Julia.

JULIA

We would have all done the same thing.

KAT

I should have helped her.

JULIA

It's gonna be OK. So Kenya, why do you think -

KENYA

I need to understand the special theory of relativity!!

JULIA

You sound more like Maddy than Maddy.

(MADDY is there.)

MADDY

I'm dead.

JULIA

A B-plus in Calc is not fatal.

MADDY

Miz Jeffries just called me into her office - at NIGHT! - to accuse me of posting something really rude on the website for Sarah. "Good riddance to Sarah Gardner. One less neurotic perfectionist whack job making everybody else feel like shit."

KAT

That's horrible.

MADDY

Her parents saw it and complained to Miz Jeffries. Somehow they traced it to my phone. She's suspending me. Suspending me!! She's calling my parents right now!! *Everything we've done for you, Maddy, and this is how you repay us.*

JULIA

You didn't do that, did you?

MADDY

I don't know! No. Maybe? Did I? I must have. No, I didn't. Yes, I did. No, I didn't! Yes, I did!!

(MADDY is gone.)

KAT

Wait. You think I did? You think I did.

(KAT is gone.)

JULIA

Joanne? JOANNE??!! Mom?

(JULIA is gone. MADDY runs furiously through the night. She runs into a giant Moth Larva dangling from a thread.)

MADDY

AAAH!

MOTH LARVA

Hello. Are you enjoying your run?

MADDY

Oh. My.

MOTH LARVA

You don't usually run this late at night, do you? At least I've never seen you. Of course, I don't always dangle, you know. Most of the time I'm up there.

MADDY

You're very...large.

MOTH LARVA

I have been eating a great deal in preparation for my next stage. Do you think I'm fat?

MADDY

I didn't say that.

MOTH LARVA

You implied it. I can see it in your face. A little disgust, perhaps. Lip curled, ever so slightly, eyebrows drawn together just a scosh, frontalis and supercillii -

MADDY

I don't mean -

MOTH LARVA

I'm supposed to eat, for heaven's sake. It's what I do. Not here of course. Up there. On the leaves. Which is where I'm going back to, if you'll excuse me.

MADDY

So why are you here?

MOTH LARVA

I believe it's to eventually find a mate and produce offspring.

MADDY

No, I mean why are you dangling?

MOTH LARVA

Why do you think?

MADDY

You fell off.

MOTH LARVA

No. Try again.

MADDY

You got blown off.

MOTH LARVA

No, I have excellent traction. Keep going.

MADDY

You...were trying to throw yourself off of that leaf and you got caught?

MOTH LARVA

Close. Why do you think I threw myself off the leaf?

MADDY

I don't know.

MOTH LARVA

Well, think of something.

MADDY

Because you're fat?

MOTH LARVA

No.

MADDY

Because you have no true friends?

MOTH LARVA

No.

MADDY

Because you're in big trouble and your life is essentially over?

MOTH LARVA

Wrong again.

MADDY

Then just tell me!!

MOTH LARVA

You're very tense!

MADDY

Please tell me.

MOTH LARVA

Better. I jumped off the leaf because I sensed a predator.

MADDY

What kind of predator?

MOTH LARVA

I didn't stick around long enough to find out. And that's why I'm still alive.

MADDY

And you have a...a...

MOTH LARVA

Silk filament, yes. Stronger than steel. Proportionally, of course. Which I will continue to climb back up, if you will excuse me.

MADDY

What if the predator is still there?

MOTH LARVA

My predators are generally too hungry to lie around in wait for the likes of me. And they tend to have short little spans of attention.

MADDY

But what if there's another predator there?

MOTH LARVA

Then I will deal with it in the moment. Do you always worry this much?

MADDY

Yes.

MOTH LARVA

So you are a lot like me.

MADDY

How?

MOTH LARVA

We are both at the ends of our filaments. But I've been here many times. Oh, it's not pleasant, I assure you, but it doesn't last. Pain is only temporary. Glory is eternal.

MADDY

This is my first time at the end of my filament. I mean, the real end.

(SARAH is there.)

MADDY

We were eating dessert.
So. You must be so psyched for tomorrow.

SARAH

Yeah.

MADDY

It must be so great to not have to worry about college.

SARAH

Not have to worry?

MADDY

Yeah, I just mean, like, you know you'll get in anywhere you want.

SARAH

Yeah, right.

MADDY

Not that you don't deserve it. You do. I mean, not just for winning State. I know you've got, like, really great grades and you play the -

SARAH

I haven't won State yet. It's tomorrow, remember?

MADDY

I just meant -

SARAH

Stuff can happen. A lot can happen.

MADDY

I didn't mean... So...did you have to write an essay?

SARAH

Of course I had to write an essay -

MADDY

I just wondered. What did you write about?

SARAH

It was stupid.

MADDY

No, really, I'd like to know. I have to do it next year, of course. Unless it's personal.

SARAH

It's not personal. It's just...it didn't really...you know?

MADDY

No.

SARAH

I...I wrote about these...these worms...Do you ever see them when we're running? These little green inchworms that dangle on these threads, right in the middle of the trail. Almost like they're floating in space, like little aliens almost! Only their name isn't really inchworms...they're the larvae of geometer moths. See, I told you this was incredibly boring.

MADDY

No, I've seen them, too.

SARAH

And they're climbing up this invisible thread, trying to get back to the leaf that they fell off of, or got scared off of, usually, trying to avoid some predator.

MADDY

That's really interesting.

SARAH

And they got named geometer moths because they supposedly look like they're measuring the Earth with the motion of their bodies, but they're not, of course. They're not measuring any distances. They're just...they're just trying to survive.

MADDY

Uh huh.

SARAH

I mean, why do people assign them some job, some role, that's supposedly important? I mean isn't their mere existence enough? Isn't their mere existence worth something?

MADDY

So what's your thesis statement?

SARAH

Maddy, what would you think if I didn't win the race?

MADDY

You know with all that whipped cream and spongecake stuff in your mouth I swear I thought you said -

SARAH

Would it be OK with you if I didn't win tomorrow?

MADDY

But you are going to win.

SARAH

But would it be OK with you if I didn't?

MADDY

Sure. I guess.

SARAH

Even if that meant we didn't win State and you couldn't put "State Champion" on your resume?

MADDY

Sure. Sure.

SARAH

And everyone else? You think they'd be OK if I ruined their chance to call themselves a state champion?

MADDY

Sure they would.

SARAH

And would you still like me exactly the same?

MADDY

Of course.

MADDY

And I feel my eyebrows wrinkle. And I feel my upper lip tighten. And I feel my eyelids start to close down. And I know that even though my words say yes, my face says no. And she knows I'm lying to her. She can read faces, too.

(SARAH is gone.)

MOTH LARVA

How can you be sure she could read faces as well as you can?

MADDY

I think it's what you do when you're at the end of your filament.

MOTH LARVA

Well, if you'll excuse me, I need to be getting back to the eating and such so I can turn into a moth someday and perform flight patterns that may or may not be reducible to complex mathematical equations.

MADDY

What are the equations? Please, I have to know. If I can discover them right now maybe my parents won't -

MOTH LARVA

How should I know? I'm not there yet.

MADDY

When you get there, will you tell me? Please?

MOTH LARVA

It doesn't seem particularly high priority.

MADDY

My life depends on it!

MOTH LARVA

I deal with the moment and MY life depends on getting back up to my leaf. Cheers.

MADDY

Wait. You threw yourself off that leaf to avoid a predator. You didn't even know what it was but it was so frightening that you...you just had to run and jump.

MOTH LARVA

I don't so much run as sort of inch, really.

MADDY

Subject: Important. Just run and jump. Run and jump! Just RUN AND JUMP!

(MADDY runs off.)

MOTH LARVA

You shouldn't do that unless you have a really nice strong filament coming out of your abdomen.

(The MOTH LARVA is gone. MADDY arrives at her room. She opens the door on the Juliet Balcony and is clearly scared of heights. She leans out on the balcony and can not jump. KENYA is there.)

KENYA

I told Miz Jeffries I did it.

MADDY

What?

KENYA

I made that post.

MADDY

From my phone?

KENYA

When I opened your email.

MADDY

Because I wouldn't help you?

KENYA

It wasn't about you!

MADDY

Then why did you use my phone?

KENYA

I don't have my own fancy-ass phone, remember?

MADDY

Did Miz Jeffries suspend you?

KENYA

You already know the answer to that. I have to write an apology letter. *Baby, you better thank your lucky stars they didn't kick you out!* Oh Mama, they ain't gonna kick me out. They're giving me extra help! Tutors and counselors and a community service plan so I can feel better about myself! I don't want to even think about what I'd have to do to get out of this place.

Good luck with your bugs.

(KENYA is gone. MADDY closes the Juliet balcony door. She gets her pill bottle. She puts it back. She goes to KENYA and JULIA's room where JULIA and KAT are working on the mandala.)

MADDY

Kat? I want to say something more than just about her SAT's. And I want to say it, not write it. I don't know how to do that.

Can you help me?

JULIA

Are you sure that's a really good idea right now, Maddy?

MADDY

Kat, can you help me?

I'm sorry I thought it was you.

(KENYA is by herself.)

KENYA

They wanted a long distance runner, Mama. They got a long distance runner.

(KENYA runs. KAT films MADDY, who picks at her skin.)

MADDY

So tomorrow is the Sarah Gardner memorial meet. And I still don't know why a moth larva is important, and I guess I need to work on figuring that out. I didn't think the strawberry shortcake in your mouth made you hard to understand. I heard you the first time. And I lied. It wasn't OK with me if we didn't win. And I'm sorry it wasn't.

(MADDY picks up JULIA's book and flips through it. MADDY and KAT are gone. KENYA appears to arrive at a highway with lots of traffic. She makes a sign to hack a ride. A man, well dressed and in his 40's, approaches with flowers.)

KENYA

You didn't have to bring me flowers. All I want is a ride.

(The man walks past her.)

KENYA

Are you heading into the city? I live in the Bronx but you can just drop me anywhere near the subway. I got a little money.

THE MAN

I'm sorry. I'm not heading in that direction.

KENYA

Well...wherever you're going, if you could drop me off at a train station or something, that would work, too.

THE MAN

I'm not going -

KENYA

I'll do whatever you want. Make it worth your time.

THE MAN

Just back off! I'm not going anywhere for a few hours, except a few miles down that road. If you'll please excuse me.

KENYA

Excuse you?

THE MAN

I was hoping to spend a few moments here alone.

KENYA

Here?

THE MAN

Please. If you could just thumb your ride a hundred yards down. I'm sure someone will stop.

KENYA

What are the flowers for?

THE MAN

My daughter was killed here. I just wanted to mark the spot as a memorial to her.

KENYA

She was in a car accident?

THE MAN

No. Please.

KENYA

When did she pass?

THE MAN

I would just like to have a few moments with her.

KENYA

Up there, that's Bishop Road, isn't it?

THE MAN

Yes.

KENYA

Are you Mr. Gardner?

MR. GARDNER

Yes.

KENYA

I go to Thwaite.

MR. GARDNER

Did you know Sarah well?

KENYA

I'm new this year.

MR. GARDNER

Well, I'm planning to go to the meet in her honor this afternoon, and I thought I would stop by here first.

KENYA

What about your wife?

MR. GARDNER

She's at the motel. She did pick out the flowers. Do they know you're out here hitching a ride to the city?

KENYA

It's an open weekend. This is how I usually -

MR. GARDNER

Mrs. Jeffries told us it would be a closed weekend and that everyone was expected to attend. I told her not to do that, that the girls shouldn't be punished for... Do the girls talk about it much?

KENYA

Honestly?

MR. GARDNER

Please.

KENYA

No. I think they're scared.

MR. GARDNER

Scared?

KENYA

That they might be next.

MR. GARDNER

Jesus.

KENYA

It's a hard place.

MR. GARDNER

Is it?

KENYA

I think it's very hard.

MR. GARDNER

I've wondered. If there was something about the place. Something in the water, as the expression goes. We didn't - her mother and I - at least we tried not to -

KENYA

I don't think you did.

MR. GARDNER

How would you know?

KENYA

Those girls...that place. I don't think it was you.

MR. GARDNER

But did she?
What's your name?

KENYA

Kenya.

MR. GARDNER

So why are you running away, Kenya?

KENYA

I don't know.

MR. GARDNER

Are you angry at someone?

KENYA

No one in particular.

MR. GARDNER

Some thing, then?

KENYA

No.

MR. GARDNER

Then why?

KENYA

I don't know!

MR. GARDNER

Then who are you taking it out on? The school? Your parents? If you're angry about something or unhappy about something, then for God's sake, for your parents' sake, say something to someone, OK? Say something! Instead of running!

KENYA

I don't belong there!

MR. GARDNER

Where do you belong?

KENYA

I don't belong anywhere! I'm just their project, their experiment! I am a statistic! I am a dark face on a website, a tick mark on somebody's spreadsheet, an outcome on somebody's action plan.

MR. GARDNER

And what would you rather be?

KENYA

I don't want to be somebody's trophy!

MR. GARDNER

I asked what you wanted to be, not what you don't want to be.

KENYA

I just want to be. No expectations other than to just be.

MR. GARDNER

And who have you told that to?

KENYA

Only you.

MR. GARDNER

And what can I do about it?

KENYA

My Mama won't listen.

MR. GARDNER

Then where are you running?
I'll drive you back to school in a few minutes.

KENYA

I'm not going -

MR. GARDNER

I just want to place these flowers. I think this is where it happened. I don't know. Someone posted a description -

KENYA

I read that.

MR. GARDNER

I guess it doesn't really matter where.

KENYA

It does. I think this is probably right about where. I've thought about it a lot.
I think about it every day. Every minute.

(KENYA guides MR. GARDNER to the right location. He places the flowers.)

MR. GARDNER

This is the first time I've been here.

KENYA

Me, too.

MR. GARDNER

Thank you.

KENYA

I'll leave you alone.

(KENYA starts to walk away. She stops.)

KENYA

I wrote something terrible on the memorial website.

MR. GARDNER.

Oh.

KENYA

I'm sorry.

MR. GARDNER

You didn't even know her.

KENYA

Can I ask you something? Do you think she would have jumped if she had lost?

MR. GARDNER

I have no idea.

KENYA

Would you have loved her exactly the same if she had lost?

MR. GARDNER

Sarah was not pressured by her parents. Not in the least. And that is the horror.

KENYA

But there were special coaches and expectations and scouts and dreams -

MR. GARDNER

She had the talent to win. Obviously.

KENYA

But would you have loved her exactly the same if she hadn't?

MR. GARDNER

Will your mother love you exactly the same if you don't make the most of your talents? Give me a moment. I'll drive you back.

(MR. GARDNER is gone and KENYA is alone.)

KENYA

Mama, if I fail here, will you love me exactly the same? Yes, *baby*.

(An announcer is heard. "Welcome to the Sarah Gardner Memorial Cross Country Meet. This is a three mile course." MADDY, KAT, KENYA and JULIA are there. KAT is not dressed to run.)

MADDY

You run the first third of any race with your head.

KAT

You run the middle third with your legs.

JULIA

You run the final third with your heart.

(The announcer says, "Runners take your marks!")

KENYA

I wish you were here, Mama. Look at me, first on the team. *I knew you could do it, baby.* And all over their website.

(The announcer says, "Runners set!")

MADDY

There's my Dad. *Run hard, Maddy!* Twenty-one minutes of torture, pain and agony that I could be spending on my project.

JULIA

There's Joanne. Chatting away with some other mom. I guess. Yes, Joanne, thanks to you I haven't lost much weight. *Don't blame me!* You sent me all that kugel! *And you ate it? All of it?* Yeah. It was good, too. *I'm so glad you liked it.*

(There is the sound of a starting gun and cheering.)

KAT

This is going to be my last video for AdmitKat.com. My season's over. And there are fifty state champions you want for your program, so why bother following me? But if Sarah Gardner proved one thing it was that there is no such thing as a sure thing.

KENYA

6:42 first mile. Shit. I gotta run two more. *I'm real proud of you, baby.* 'Cause I can run three miles? *'Cause you told that man the truth.*

MADDY

First mile spilt: 7:30. There's my Dad. *All right, Maddy, Good job, sweetie. Hang tough.* His corrugator muscle wrinkling his forehead, his buccinators pursing his lips. Disappointment verging on embarrassment.

JULIA

First mile split. 9:39. Woo hoo! Hey, Joanne! I'm next to last! *Then slow down, sweetie. The last girl always gets the most applause!* Jesus, Joanne, what's happened to you? Wait, is that woman...is that...Joanne, do you have a girlfriend??

KAT

I was the last person to talk to Sarah. I didn't talk. I screamed. I screamed hateful things to someone who was in a lot of pain. Not that anyone jumps off a bridge because you scream at them...but it doesn't help.

KENYA

Two mile split in 13:45. *And you thought you couldn't do what they wanted.* They don't let me wear my hoops, Mama! *I hate those hoops!* I almost came home, Mama! *That's not an option, baby, and you gotta deal with that.*

MADDY

Two mile split: 15:06. *Pick' em and pass 'em, Maddy! Make us proud!* To be truly alive we must accept pain. We must do more than accept it. We must seek it out, live with it and learn to not fear it.

(MADDY stops running.)

Oh my God. I forgot to make pink footie cutouts for everyone. I've never forgotten that before.

JULIA

Second mile split. 19:25. Sarah would have finished the whole course a few minutes ago. Good job, Sarah. *Good job, Julia.* It's awesome to go slow. I can feel my heart beating. I can feel the breeze and the sweat, and my thighs and my feet and my brain and I see the trees and the falling leaves, and the dangling moth larvae working their way back up.

KAT

When someone is in trouble...you have to stop what you're doing and help them. I might have been able to help. A little. And I didn't. And I guess I have to learn to live with that.

KENYA

Final time: 20:41. I burned up that last mile, Mama. Seventh place. And I even leaned at the end.

MADDY

(*now walking away*)

We must learn to not fear pain. We must learn to not fear. Stressed is just desserts spelled backwards. Desserts. Desserts. Deserted. Deserted is just detested spelled backwards.

JULIA

Final time? 31:51. You see a lot when you run as slow as I do. You don't lose much weight. A third of the season, Mom, and I've only lost three pounds. *So don't worry, I'll get you the eye surgery as a birthday present, no questions asked.* Oh, I don't know. I'm not sure about that anymore. Probably not. We'll see.

KAT

"To be truly alive we must accept pain. We must do more than accept it. We must seek it out, live with it and learn to not fear it."

(MADDY arrives at her room.)

MADDY

I need to work on my project!

KAT

Is your Dad -

MADDY

I need to concentrate. I haven't discovered anything.

KAT

Sure, but...

MADDY

Thank you so much, Kat.

KAT

But -

MADDY

Thank you so much!

(KAT starts to leave.)

MADDY

Kat? I forgot to make pink footie cutouts for everyone.

KAT

So, you'll do them next time.

MADDY

But I missed this time. I've never forgotten before.

KAT

So make two next time.

MADDY

Like I have time for that. Like I have time for even one!

KAT

Maddy -

MADDY

I need to work on my project!!

(KAT leaves the room but stands just outside. MADDY takes out a box that contains several bottle of pills. She empties them into a bowl and stares at them. She plays with them. She scoops up a handful and prepares to swallow them. KAT reenters the room.)

KAT

Maddy!

MADDY

I have THREE DAYS to discover the secret of moth flight!

(KAT and MADDY struggle over the pills. KAT gets them away from MADDY.)

KAT

Maddy, look at me. Look at me! You don't need to discover anything or make pink footie cutouts or do anything.

MADDY

Those are for ME!

KAT

It doesn't matter! Look at my face, Maddy. Look at my frontalis or supercillii or whatever. I'm being completely honest. None of this matters.

MADDY

Says the girl with her own website. Give them back!

KAT

I'm taking down the website.

MADDY

I swear to God if you don't give me those right now -

(KAT takes her one remaining high performance shoe and starts grinding the pills into sand. MADDY screams and tries to stop her, but KAT isn't deterred.)

KAT

That's what she meant by "important".

(KAT scoops up the "sand" and the remaining pills and runs into JULIA and KENYA's room. KENYA and JULIA are there. When MADDY enters the room she sees the mandala, and it appears to us: an exquisite, colorful butterfly. KAT adds the pill sand to the mandala. MADDY wants to add to the mandala, so she takes the shoe and finishes grinding the pills into sand. MADDY adds the new sand to the mandala. The four girls look at the now completed mandala, and we are surrounded by it - a colorful butterfly that envelops us.)

KAT

We should put this on the memorial website.

JULIA

No.

KAT

But -

JULIA

No. Just look at it. We just look at it. Nothing else.
Now.

MADDY

I want to take a picture.

JULIA

No. Just look at it and enjoy it.

(SARAH is there.)

SARAH

Oh my God! This is so beautiful! Isn't this the awesomest thing? It looks like it's just floating there!

JULIA

In a moment the sands need to be swept up and poured into a river or stream.

MADDY

But -

JULIA

So the waters can then carry their healing energies throughout the world.

KAT

Muddy Creek.

KENYA

Maybe that place where we always see the moth larvae.

MADDY

I'm sorry I forgot to make the footie cutouts for this meet. I was going to use something from Julia's book, I really was. I know this...wait..."The real destroyer of our happiness is..." something...

JULIA

"The real destroyer of our happiness is always there within us...So long as the enemy is there, and so long as we are under its control, there can be no permanent happiness."

(The four girls sweep up the sands
and are gone. SARAH is there,
watching the green moth larva,
revealed in the email video, climbing
up its filament. The sands appear
to swirl around her and cover her
in a wave of color.)

SARAH

Isn't this the awesomest thing?

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF PLAY)