

**GIRLS
ON
THE
VERGE**

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*For my niece and best friend, Ashley,
and for my aunt Pam, who inspired me to join
the fight when I was a little girl—
we are three generations of feminists*

No woman can call herself free who does not own
and control her body. No woman can call herself free
until she can choose consciously whether she will or
will not be a mother.

—Margaret Sanger

JUNE 25, 2013

Texas State Senator Wendy Davis (D) stands in her pink sneakers holding a thirteen-hour filibuster to block Senate Bill 5, which restricts abortion access in the state. The bill bans abortions after twenty weeks, requires clinics to meet the same requirements as surgical centers, requires the clinics' doctors to have hospital admitting privileges, and requires a revisit to the doctor fourteen days after a medical abortion. She succeeds.

JULY 16, 2013

At the end of June, Texas Governor Rick Perry calls a special session to vote on House Bill 2 (HB2), which would set forth provisions that would result in closing the majority of abortion clinics in the state of Texas. The bill is signed into law on July 18.

JUNE 2014

As of this date, only nineteen abortion clinics remain open for the entire 269,000 square miles that make up Texas, populated by more than five million women of reproductive age.

ONE
JUNE 30

I've been ready to leave for the past hour, but that doesn't mean I want to. I didn't sleep. I lay in bed all night, watching the glowing red numbers on my alarm clock blink down the hours.

I straighten the quilt my grandma gave me for what seems like the hundredth time.

My phone buzzes, startling me.

Here. I'm early so take your time.

I pick up my backpack and purse and take a last look around my room to make sure I have everything.

I shut my door and head down the stairs, sliding my hand along the banister worn smooth from seventeen years' worth of touching. I make sure to avoid the squeaky step Dad always promises to fix but never will.

In the kitchen, I get a glass of water and gulp it down. The

refrigerator hums, the hall clock ticks, the AC makes that weird noise that no electrician can figure out. It's strange the things you notice when you're really paying attention. The family pictures on the dining room wall across from me have hung there my whole life. There's a formal portrait of my grandma and mom, both of them in powder blue dresses, standing side by side. Next to it, a collage of my brother and me from kindergarten to junior year, baby-toothed smiles to awkward braces, a blank space reserved for my senior picture. And then there's my parents on their wedding day. Dad in his rented tux, Mom in her glittery gown and poofy veil. She holds a huge bouquet of lilies.

I scribble a note for my parents, draw a heart on it, and pin it to the bulletin board. I throw a couple of bananas, two granola bars, and a bottle of Sprite into a plastic bag, cram my feet into my Chucks, and open the door.

The sun is just starting to come up, but it's already hot. The paperboy appears over the hill; his loaded bag, crossed over his chest, pulls him sideways. I stop and watch as he flings the folded newspapers at the houses. They all fall short, landing on lawns. But the next one thunks onto my neighbor's porch and the boy pumps his fist in the air.

Annabelle, seeing me, jumps out of the car and opens the passenger door.

Annabelle's car seats are covered with black fleece seat covers embroidered with the words *Black Cherry* over the headrests. A

cobalt blue evil eye swings from her rearview mirror by a leather strap. The floor is littered with flattened foam coffee cups. I carefully place my feet between a Giddyup cup and a Sonic one.

Annabelle has two orange plastic go-cups of coffee in her cup holders. The smell of the coffee makes me feel nauseous and hungry at the same time. She gets in the driver's side and shuts her door. "Sorry the car is such a mess. I didn't have time to shovel her out." She points to the cups of coffee. "I did bring nectar of the gods, though. And I wore my new favorite T-shirt."

I look at it. *I STAND WITH WENDY DAVIS*, it reads. And underneath the caption is a pair of pink sneakers.

"I thought we could use some of Wendy's courage. Coffee and courage, what more do we need?" She pauses for a moment, studying me. "Are you okay?"

I shake my head. "No, not really."

"We don't have to do this if you don't want to," Annabelle says. "We can turn around at any point. Just say the word."

"I do," I blurt out, a little harder than I mean to. "I mean . . . I do want to do this."

"It's going to be all right, Camille."

Annabelle grabs one of the coffees from the cup holder, takes a sip, puts her car in gear, and drives off.

"Didn't you have a Bug before? I remember you driving a yellow Volkswagen," I say.

"I sold her before I went to England. I bought Buzzi for when I'm home."

"Buzzi?"

“That’s what I named this car—after Ruth Buzzi. Have you heard of her?”

I shake my head.

“She’s this comedian from the sixties. She lives near Stephenville on this big horse ranch, and she collects all these cool vintage cars with her husband. She was on *Sesame Street* a lot back in the day. Anyway, I’d love to have vintage cars like hers someday.” Annabelle pats the steering wheel. “Buzzi’s not much of a car, but she tries.”

“I’ve never heard of anyone naming a car before.”

“You gotta name your car! It’s the only way to really get to know it. Otherwise it’s just a hunk of metal and wheels.” She smiles and pushes the gearshift.

Annabelle looks so cool shifting, like she’s a race car driver. After she shifts, she leaves her hand on the gear knob, her fingers cupping the bottom of it. I like how that looks. Kind of tough. Like you really know what you’re doing and don’t really care what anyone thinks about it.

“Is it hard to drive a stick shift?”

“It is at first. But then it’s easy when you get the hang of it. My cousin taught me because my ass-hat of a father couldn’t be bothered to.”

I reach for a granola bar to settle my stomach. I eat it, watching out the window as the familiar landmarks of my town go by: the Holler Up, Jess’s Jewelers, the Giddyup.

“God, I’m so glad to get out of Johnson Creek,” Annabelle says.

“Even if it’s a shitty reason why,” I say. My shoulders are so tense, my muscles ache.

“So, listen. Bea called me last night.”

“What? God, she never gives up.” I should have known that Bea would search for a work-around. “Did she try to talk you out of taking me?”

“No. She wants to come.”

“Well, she can’t.”

I take a sip of coffee, but the taste of it makes me feel pukey. I jam the cup back into the cup holder and grab the plastic bag. I dump the contents on the back seat and put the bag on my lap, just in case. I open the Sprite and take a sip.

“Do you need me to pull over?” Annabelle asks, casting a nervous look my way. “I mean, I won’t hate you if you puke, but I’d rather you not.”

“No. I’m okay.”

“I told her I’d ask you, but I wouldn’t guarantee it.”

“I don’t know why she’d want to.”

“She told me she wants to support you.”

We reach the YMCA. A pack of boys are running laps around the track outside. We stop at a traffic light by the chain link fence that borders the track. As the pack gets closer, I can see their arm muscles flexing as they run. Their eyes are intense, and their shirts are soaked with sweat.

Guys get to run in the fresh air and then probably hang out with their girlfriends or their buddies while I get to travel to nearly Mexico to chase down some pills.

Annabelle takes a drink from her coffee and looks at the runners over her go-cup. “I can’t imagine running around a track at the butt-crack of dawn like that.”

“Me either.”

Annabelle rolls the window down and sticks her head out. “Hey, assholes!” she yells. One of the boys in the back of the pack turns his head.

I can’t help it. I burst out laughing.

She looks over at me and grins. “So, what do you want to do?”

If I say no to Bea after she has tried to reach out, I’m pretty much ending our friendship. I can’t stand the thought of that. But I also can’t stand the thought of listening to her trying to convince me to change my mind. I sigh. “She can come.”

I direct Annabelle to Bea’s house. She’s waiting on the porch step already. A huge duffel bag, a pillow, and a grocery bag rest at her feet. “Overpacked as usual,” I mutter.

Bea gets up and walks toward the car. Mrs. Delgado waves at us from the door. It’s just after seven o’clock, yet she’s already fully dressed in white pants and a striped shirt and pearls. Her hair is gathered into a bun.

Annabelle gets out and goes up the walk to help Bea. I stay in the car staring straight ahead. The driver’s door opens, and Bea climbs into the back.

I don’t turn around. I don’t look at her. “You say one thing to try to make me change my mind, Beatrice Delgado, and I swear we’ll dump you on the side of the road.”

“I know,” Bea says. She puts her hand on the seat by my shoulder. “I promise I won’t.”

Annabelle slides in, puts on her seat belt, and drives off.

“Why do you want to come anyway?” I ask.

She takes her hand away. “You’re my best friend, and I should be here with you.”

It’s hard to believe that just ten days ago, my life was exactly what I wanted it to be. I was heading to Willow, a supercompetitive theater camp, and I’d played my dream role of Ophelia at the midsummer production of *Hamlet* at the Globe Southwest Youth Theater. The actor who played Hamlet—a very dreamy boy from France—liked me. And that very same boy, Léo, was going to be at said camp sans parental supervision for a whole week.

I stare out the window and hope no one sees the tears in my eyes.