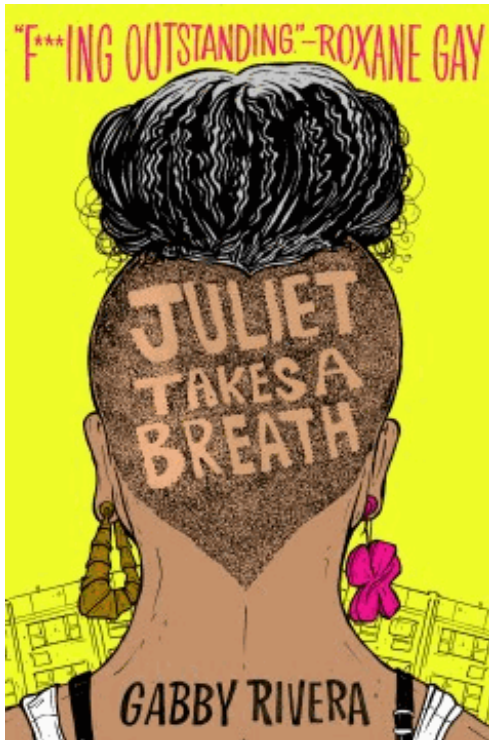


JULIET TAKES A BREATH



Young Adult

By Gabby Rivera

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CONTENT WARNING

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Book Summary:

A young homosexual woman learns more about herself after getting involved with a radical feminist she once admired.

Summary of Concerns:

This book contains alternate sexualities; alternate gender ideologies; alcohol and drug use; excessive/frequent profanity and derogatory terms; controversial and inflammatory racial commentary; controversial historical, racial, and social commentary; discussion of self-harm involving cutting.

3 /5

Minor Restricted
BookLooks Review Rating

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1	It's definitely a reading from the book of white lady feminism and yet, there are moments where I see my round brown ass in your words.
2	But please don't ask me about anything that happened in that class afterward because love is an acid trip.
3	How do I tell my parents that I'm gay? Gay sounds just as weird as feminist. ...And I'm supposed to be ashamed of being gay, but now that I've had sex with girls, I don't feel any shame at all. In fact, it's pretty fucking amazing.
9	"We are born with the power of the moon and the flow of the waves within us. It's only after being commodified for our femaleness that we lose that power. The first step in gaining it back is walking face-first into the crashing seas and daring the patriarchy to stop us."
11	They bragged about their conquests over "some bitches from last night." ...All they did was talk smack about how good they laid down the pipe.
13	I didn't know how else to reach out to this man who'd been smoking crack in between the same two buildings for almost twenty years. ...I nodded and kept it moving, past his smoke spot, past the row of cab drivers, past the seventeen-year-old girls snatched up for prostitution and their eighteen-year-old pimps.
15	"I said you lookin' mad good," he repeated, his breath harsh on my neck. ... "I'm gay and not interested," I blurted out. ... "That's a damn shame. Maybe you just need this good D right here," he said as he grabbed his crotch. He stared at me and gave himself a good up and down stroke.
16	This halter top was half a size too small but made my tetas look amazing. ...I wondered what dudes like them really expected of girls like me in those situations. Like, did they want me to drop to my knees in the middle of the supermarket and orally worship their Ds? ...I'd never said I was gay out loud to anyone I didn't know. What was happening? Was I practicing? God, now those dudes were always going to know me as Dyke on the Block. I imagined that they'd be offering me their "good Ds" forever.
18	"Don't ever be an asshole on the streets. Don't ever tell girls that you wanna grab their bodies or corner them in supermarkets while you touch your junk," I said, kissing his chubby cheeks.
26	"Thank you for all of this but listen to me. I am gay. Gay, gay, gay. I've been dating Lainie for the past year. This isn't a joke. I've been wondering for weeks how to tell you all, and this is the best I've got. I'm definitely a lesbian."
35	"Red meat comes from what the patriarchy calls 'the industrialization of food' but in reality, it's the separation of humanity from their own food production and from Mother Earth. It's also wholly dependent on the enslavement of other individuals and animals. That terror and disregard for life seeps into our souls and bodies with every bite. It's an absolute poison to the pussy. Don't believe me? Go down on a meat-eater and tell me if you can't taste the sadness."
50	She said, "Your mixtape is all songs by women. All women come from faeries, goddesses, warriors, and witches, Juliet. But we don't know anything about the

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	<p>women who birthed those women. We don't know who our ancestral mothers are. I want you to help me find them. We have to tell their stories before they disappear forever amid all the violent and whitewashed history of men. My next book is all about reclaiming our mystical and political lineage. And you, Juliet, you're going to be the faerie hunter, minus the guns or actual hunting."</p> <p>...“You really think all women come from faeries?” I was a little blazed but not “faerie hunter” blazed. I wasn't even sure if I was fully awake.</p> <p>“Of course I believe that, Juliet. I mean, where else would we come from?” Harlowe responded. “Certainly not from the rib of some 'fraidy-cat snitch named Adam.”</p>
59	<p>Kids in the Bronx always told me I was too weird or white-acting to be Puerto Rican. Now this Phen dude was telling me that I was too indoctrinated by mainstream society to be down with nakedness.</p>
61	<p>She flipped open the jar's lid to reveal a small mountain of bright green bud. This was not your typical dry-ass bag of regs littered with seeds and stems that you got from so-and-so's cousin up the block. No, this was manna from the weed gods.</p> <p>...Harlowe removed a glass pipe from the velvet pouch. It was clear along the mouth and turned blood orange the farther it got to the bowl.</p> <p>“These are my trees and my Saturn-ruled smoking pipe,” Harlowe said, voice melodic and calm. “Juliet, whenever you want to partake, feel free. Use as much as you want, whenever you want. All I ask is that you use my instruments with care and return them to a safe place. Saturn doesn't always want to be kept in the cupboard. She will let you know her desired resting place.”</p> <p>...It was nice to not be in some white boy's dorm room trying to clear a five-foot bong while listening to Dave Matthews with everyone chanting, “Toke! Toke! Toke!” The three of us took hits off of Saturn.</p> <p>Phen blew out a slow spiral of smoke.</p>
62	<p>Readings at school were often all-white—boring. People read things about the silences in the trees and most nights some privileged wannabe “outsider” white boy claimed the open mic to lament the fact that no chicks would bang them.</p>
65	<p>“...Men in public or even in the house should never be able to see the outline of your tetas or the poke of your nipples. Put your bra on the second you wake up in the morning. Men can't handle seeing those things. It makes them crazy. Remember, they're just not as smart as we are, mama...”</p>
66	<p>I was used to the buttoned up, wealthy, Casper-skinned whites that always spoke in their library voices and used words like sassy and spicy to describe me. I was used to white people that embodied the suburban American dream. White people like Lainie's parents, who wished their daughters weren't dating me, but tolerated it and engaged me in discussions about affirmative action and how I benefited from it. White people who informed me that my fellow Latinos were “genetically more violent” than the average white boy all while inviting me to their summer home on the Cape. I was comfortable with white people who only sweat during a friendly game of tennis with their law school buddies.</p>
67	<p>Some of these hippie white girls looked summer-sweet, like the type you make wild love to lakeside somewhere surrounded by dandelions, possibly on hallucinogenic drugs.</p>

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	...He crossed his arms over his chest and asked, "So, Juliet, how do you identify? What are your preferred gender pronouns?"
68	Phen half rolled his eyes, "Oh c'mon, do you identify as queer? As a dyke? Are you trans?" he asked, spitting phrases at me, amused by my ignorance. "And PGPs are so important even though I think we should drop preferred and call them mandatory gender pronouns. So, are you she, he, ze, they?" ...Trans? Ze? PGPs? Those words weren't a part of my vocabulary. No one in the Bronx or even in college asked me if I was a ze or trans.
69	But for some reason this song was the test: Are you Puerto Rican enough, Juliet Palante? Do you know the words? Are you down with us? Or are you just a white girl with brown skin?
85	Blessings to your continued takedown of the white supremacist heteropatriarchy.
91	Maybe I'd missed all the radical pronoun terms amid all the discussion about vaginas and feminism and the dismantling of the patriarchy forever.
94	ON THE ROAD TO POLYAMORY AND GOD
95	Squeezed in between them, my D-cup breasts filled the space in front of me and pushed farther out than Maxine's or Harlowe's chest. I was both uncomfortable and so proud; I've always loved my breasts. I've loved them for the way they defied gravity: full, brown, perfect. They held court over my soft belly, another part of me that I was always aware of, another section of thickness that announced itself by daring to exist.
98	"Poly's short for polyamory, which is just a queer way of saying you're open to multiple partners." "Oohh, like that HBO documentary about the middle-aged white people throwing swing parties in their mansions," I said, nodding with excitement. ...Polyamory. Shit sounded a little like a hippified way of rationalizing outside booty or not being able to commit or something.
99	"We're all curious and beautiful humanoids. So why not just acknowledge that sometimes we're gonna get hot for someone else's mind, spirit, and sexy bits? Why not own it and discuss it as two adults? One person can't be someone else's be-all and end-all every single minute of every single day." ..."But to me, as a queer person, I have the freedom to create any type of relationship model that works for me. And what's sexier than abolishing heteronormativity while I do it? That radical power lives within every single one of us."
100	"So what's the point if you're not bringing people to God?" I asked. "We're all gods, Juliet," Harlowe said, blowing smoke out the window. "No, let's be real. There's only one God and He ain't me, you, or Maxine." ..."That's where the one God thing comes from and also why I won't be a preacher. You want answers. Make your own religion out of doubt and curiosity. Don't go running after one God." "Well, why not? Why not run after one God?" I asked. "I mean, obviously there are other gods in other religions and stuff, but I think it's all based on one God anyway. It's just the interpretation that's different." "Yes and no. The only thing we can really do, Juliet, is develop our own sustainable

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	<p>theodicies. You know? We need to create our own understanding of divine presence in a world full of chaos. My God is Black. It's queer. It's a symphony of masculine and feminine. It's Audre Lorde and Sleater-Kinney. My God and my understanding of God are centered on who I am as a person and what I need to continue my connection to the divine," Maxine explained. She took a long breath. "It's everyone's job to come up with a theodicy. One that has room for every inch of who they are and the person they evolve into."</p>
102	<p>She argued that God couldn't exist because God wasn't made up of anything solid. God couldn't be touched. God couldn't walk into a supermarket and buy a gallon of milk. Lainie had a million reasons why God wasn't real in the way that she and I were real. She explained that God was at best an elevated spiritual feeling and at worst one of the most brutal myths people have ever created.</p>
106	<p>Octavia gave us worlds caught in post-apocalyptic struggles, narratives billowing with critiques of the way racism and brutality are ingrained in white American society and culture, a culture that we must also navigate and reclaim. ... "This writing series is for the empowerment of Black women and femmes and the development of a Black womanist, Afro-futuristic writers' group. Blackness isn't limited to African Americans here. We welcome our Afro-Latinas también y toda la gente morena, negrita, el color de la noche y de café con leche. Many of our meetings are closed to non-Black, non-POC individuals but members of the group expressed interest in offering open sessions. White allies, we ask that you respect this space, own your privileges, and remain open to your own journey. We welcome all women here and hope that we can all find or further cultivate our relationship to Octavia Butler's work and to the world of science fiction. In this series of workshops, we will also produce an anthology of sci-fi short stories with a social justice lens from writers of color. Thank you, sisters, for sharing your time and essence with us all."</p>
110	<p>White Girl #1: "I loved the workshop, but, like, I don't get why the white ally thing has to be such a big deal, like why do we have to be the quiet ones? All our voices matter, you know?"</p> <p>White Girl #2: "Exactly! It's like in my feminism we're equals. Why does any group have to have the dominant voice? I know reverse racism isn't technically real, but, like, this kinda felt like that."</p> <p>Maxine and I rolled our eyes. I didn't really know what was wrong with what they said, but it felt weird. Their tone and the fact that this was what they took from the workshop felt strange but, like, whatever; white girls say dumb shit sometimes. But Harlowe spun around and addressed them. "It's not about having a 'dominant voice.' It's about women of color owning their own space and their voices being treated with dignity and respect. It's about women of color not having to shout over white voices to be heard. We are the dominant force almost all the time. White women are the stars of all the movies. White women are the lead speakers in feminist debates, and it's little white girls that send the nation into a frenzy when they've been kidnapped. So if for, like, one or two hours in a small classroom somewhere in Oregon, a group of women of color have a workshop and have decided to open it up to us, we should be fucking grateful and not whining about how we're not the most important or equally as important. Our entire existence is</p>

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	constantly being validated and yeah, we have lots of shit to deal with because of the patriarchy. But for goddess sake, check your privilege. We're the ones that need to give women of color space for their voices."
112	"I'm white," Harlowe said, stopping hard on that T. "No matter how I said it, you're going to experience the white supremacy first. We've talked about this, Max."
113	"You said, 'We're the ones that need to give women of color space for their voices,'" Maxine replied, tapping her fingers on the steering wheel. "Y'all don't need to give us anything."
116	"But white privilege makes it easy to play the victim, so I'm home making breakfast and not out chasing after her."
117	Questions about words and phrases, queerness, POC spaces, and whiteness. ... All of it seemed black and white and rich and poor and queer and weird.
121	I was suspicious of the Bible. It had never been particularly forthcoming when it came to stories about women. Mary Magdalene wasn't really a hooker, and Eve didn't force Adam to eat that apple. What did painting women as untrustworthy or whorish have to do with God's love anyway? ...They were stories about men in which women had side roles as the mother or the second wife or the daughter-for-sale. The fact that I grew up in a religious household and had never heard of Sophia further proved to me that the people interpreting the Bible were misogynists and didn't care about anything a wise woman had to say. ... Sophia is the feminine representation of the wisdom of God. ...Sophia was divine wisdom manifested as a feminine force. God had a feminine side? Or was she an entire entity? Like the Holy Spirit? Was Sophia the Holy Spirit?
125	"Know your period as you know yourself. Touch the wobbling blobs of blood and tissue that escape and land intact on your favorite period panties. Note the shades of brown and purple and volcanic reds that gush, spill, and squirt out announcing themselves. Slide fingers deep inside your cunt and learn what your period feels like before it's out of your body. Masturbate to ease cramps and meditate to soothe the spirit. Connect to your blood cycle. Build sacred rituals around your body during this time of renewal."
131	She presented me with comic books and a packed bowl full of fresh bud.
134	I took a few puffs from Saturn and blew out smoke into the air. Harlowe and Maxine were murmuring, giggling, all of it came up the stairs and mingled with the weed smoke. ...The sounds of two people working up a love sweat wafted up from below. My body ached for that type of touch and connection. To make love out loud in your own home with the woman you loved was what life goals were built around, right? The thought of pressing sweet and totally hot librarian Kira against a stack of books made me bite my bottom lip. Hard. Then we were kissing against the copy machine and daydreams had to be exempt from cheating, right? Meditation and masturbation are the only ways to relieve cramps. I made an executive decision and spent the next hour testing out the second half of Harlowe's sacred period ritual. Lainie didn't even cross my mind.

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138	<p>But also, the book didn't have that annoying white-men-are-so-important-blah-blah vibe. This dude Howard Zinn was like "Hey you, wake up, look what really happened! The government's been lying!"</p> <p>A People's History highlighted so many ways the US had always been involved in acts of terrorism and brutality.</p>
139	<p>My parents raised me to believe that I should be proud to live in the land of the free. But what the heck did any of that mean if it came at the cost of other people's countries and lives?</p> <p>...Our democratic nation took over other people's lands, drained them of all the beautiful things native to their soil, and then enslaved the populations living there to harvest it all. I mean, that's what happened here in the U.S. White colonists committed genocide against Native people, snatched land, and created a whole entire violent-ass system of slavery by stealing people from Africa to make America a profitable and safe place for whites to live.</p> <p>...The underbelly of America creeped me out; the sociopathic patriarchy was still some old devil who never got put down.</p>
140	<p>See, white people were just hella flagrant with their imperialist takeover shit. So since they needed special clothes to take over tropical countries, they decided to open up cute little stores called Banana Republics? Wow.</p>
141	<p>"No, Lainie, you can't shop there anymore. It's like named after some fucked-up shit the United States government did to Latin America for their bananas and control over them and shady stuff."</p> <p>..."Wait, this is like a thing people know? You knew this?! This is messed up, Lainie. Like, some store is profiting off a name that comes from fucking over people in Latin America. Isn't this the kind of thing we should be protesting? Or boycotting? Or one of those things you're probably doing at Democratic lesbian camp?"</p>
142	<p>"I thought you'd get hype over this corporate-funded, materialistic joke on an entire region of the globe, but you're totally good with it."</p> <p>... "I brought us delicious things for dinner from my friend's communist farm."</p>
144	<p>"She knew that the name Banana Republic actually meant something, you know. It's a tongue-in-cheek fuck-you to countries that have been exploited for their natural resources, and I just can't believe I didn't know and she did. And, like, I think I feel cheap. I've stood in that store with her a million times and have always felt my skin crawling. None of the clothes were made to fit me. None of the people shopping in there look like me. The few times I've been in there by myself, I've been followed around the store by employees. Everyone is white, skinny, and rich, and oblivious to the fact that I'm a person. I thought all those feelings were in my head, figments of my imagination, but maybe they're not. Maybe there's something ingrained in a store like that that's made me feel that way. It's bigger than the store too, right? Everything is like that in this world. It's heavy."</p> <p>"Heavy as a huge set of beautiful ovaries. Get a little hysterical, Juliet. I mean, that's why vibrators were invented, right? Ask the questions that make you feel like your heart is blasting out of your chest. Society, government, white supremacist power structures, blatant hatred of women, and a whole slew of other institutions are all working together to make it so that you gotta dig to find out even a shred of truth. They don't want you to dig. That's how this world is set up.</p>

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	People don't even want to tell you that your vagina is called a vagina, you know? Why would someone spell out the violent and racist history of their business? Capitalism, baby."
145	"Heavy as a huge set of beautiful ovaries. Get a little hysterical, Juliet. I mean, that's why vibrators were invented, right? Ask the questions that make you feel like your heart is blasting out of your chest. Society, government, white supremacist power structures, blatant hatred of women, and a whole slew of other institutions are all working together to make it so that you gotta dig to find out even a shred of truth. They don't want you to dig. That's how this world is set up. People don't even want to tell you that your vagina is called a vagina, you know? Why would someone spell out the violent and racist history of their business? Capitalism, baby."
146	I told her that I wasn't exactly sure what white allies were and asked her about the Octavia Butler workshop and if Maxine was coming home tonight.
149	"And I'm telling you the book you need on Lolita Lebrón is called The Ladies' Gallery. It was written by her granddaughter and I'm mad you don't know who she is and some white lady had to tell you about your ancestors."
150	"Nena, I'm on my ethnic studies grind. That's why you should come visit me. I'm out of school until August. Come sit on this balcony with me, smoke some trees, take the boat out, discuss the global impact of colonization and the merits of deviant sexuality."
153	Our identity as Puerto Ricans was tied into a movie where both lead actors were white. My parents didn't tell me that either. I had to find out on AMC that Natalie Wood was white, and I cried like a bitch that day. I felt robbed of something, as if a lie had been woven into the narrative of my Nuyorican identity.
168	She didn't even make any cracks about me deserving this because Lainie was white and no one told me to date a white girl. ...I smoked a little weed to try and clear the nausea out of my belly.
175	I stopped cutting, which is fucking rad and super good for my spiritual growth.
177	My seven-year-old daughter now tells people she "has a pussy and is proud of it."
181	Black Womanists United Against Bush. Discussion topics: 9/ 11 Cover-ups, Capitalist-Based Fear Mongering, Anti-Blackness, and Islamophobia.
182	"Shouldn't it be okay for a white dyke to bring their partner of color information about events related to their race or ethnicity?"
196	"Blood is literal. Blood is spiritual. Blood connects through birth, through chaos, and through intimacy. Embrace the stories of your sisters. Listen with hearts open and offer affirmations. Never assume their struggle. Never consume their truths. Do not let the assimilationist nature of the patriarchy infiltrate the sacred bonds of blood."
199	The term anti-Blackness was new to me; so was the concept of Islamophobia.
202	"That's not my deal. The whole damaged-woman-becomes-a-lesbian-and-a-feminist trope doesn't work for me. The patriarchy, aka the He-Man Woman Haters Club, created it because they don't want us to be taken seriously. They don't want us to have access to the divine knowledge our bodies possess. They

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	<p>fear our power. So no, we aren't damaged. We have suffered from the brutality of an inherently violent system that favors maleness over womanhood. We've been victimized, but that doesn't make us all victims. We're not the outcomes of what men have done to us. I refuse to be reduced to that."</p>
204	<p>Harlowe read about the time she grabbed a flashlight and a mirror, smoked a lot of weed, and explored her pussy. She was twenty-three and had never looked at her vulva. She spent an entire evening spreading the folds of her flesh, noting the color and density of hair. She liked it so much she did it again on her period. And that was her catalyst into pussy obsession.</p> <p>...Every day that we existed on this planet the forces of white men in power were aimed at policing women's bodies and subjugating our identities to make us feel lesser than, to control us through physical and economic annihilation. These acts of violence were experienced by trans women and women of color at higher rates. Harlowe urged her fellow white women to remember this and to never forget the vast amount of privilege they experience because of whiteness. It is the duty of white women to stand in solidarity with queer, trans, women of color, listen to their needs and make sure that feminism and sisterhood brings all of our voices together.</p>
206	<p>"I believe in my heart that we can all be blood sisters. Raging Flower isn't perfect by any means, but I believe it's a good start. It was for me. It's the beginning of my journey into a more politicized, woman-centric consciousness, and I wanted to share that. Do I think that queer and trans women of color will read my work and feel like they see themselves in my words? Not necessarily, but some will and do. I mean, I know someone right now sitting in this room who is a testament to this, someone who isn't white, who grew up in the ghetto, someone who is lesbian and Latina and fought for her whole life to make it out of the Bronx alive and to get an education. She grew up in poverty and without any privilege. No support from her family, especially after coming out, and that person is here today. That person is Juliet Milagros Palante, my assistant and friend, who came all the way from the Bronx to be here with me and to learn how to be a better feminist, and all of that is because of Raging Flower, because anyone can see themselves in that work. Juliet is the proof. Juliet, can you stand up for everyone, please?"</p>
211	<p>Beautiful, naked Kira moved into the shower with me. She pressed me against the cool tiles and kissed me. The weight of the evening slid off my skin as the hot water washed over us. She soaped up my chest, belly, and back. Her hands were firm. She kneaded my back muscles and kissed along my shoulder blades. I let her hands roam my flesh and explore the curves of my body. I didn't think about anything else but kissing her, all of her. She slid her hands along my thighs.</p> <p>"You feel really good to me. Are you good?" she asked. "We don't have to do anything you don't want to do. I just want to check in."</p> <p>"I don't know what I want to do. I like this. I like kissing you and feeling you. But I don't want to use you," I replied. I gazed at the droplets of water along her eyelashes.</p> <p>"I'm here. I know what it's like when you need to be kissed and touched. I don't feel used. We can take it slow and stop whenever," she said.</p> <p>Kira turned off the shower and led me to her bedroom. Both of us wrapped in</p>

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	<p>towels, bodies warm and wet, we flopped onto her bed. I followed her lead. Where she touched and pressed her lips, I did the same. She kept her hands on my thighs while she kissed my belly. Kira slid up my body. Her mouth a whisper away from mine. She made me wait for a kiss. Eye contact the whole time made me feel grown in my own body: sexy mami in full bloom. When our lips finally touched, I was hers. My body had never felt so desired and alive. We moved in rhythm with each other. And when I felt her inside me, I wrapped my hips tight around her waist and gave her everything.</p>
222	<p>“Yes and no. I’m glad you’re here. We have three days to love you good,” Titi Penny said, “and discuss the importance of naming racism when it comes for you unexpectedly in the form of a mentor, a lover, or someone who exists in the gray areas. But for now, maybe you two go upstairs, unpack, and reconnect.”</p>
223	<p>“I’m still figuring out my shit too, and the circles I run in are mad with it. Like, no time for white supremacy or second-wave white feminism. But it’s not fair for me to judge you, you know?”</p> <p>...“Luz Ángel is a brown-skinned fucking babe, queen of my heart. She doesn’t even know it. She’s so busy running Tempest, the queer and transgender people of color group on campus. Every time she speaks, I’m just done. I sit in on Tempest meetings basically hoping she notices me while learning about how to organize against and fight oppression.”</p>
224	<p>“You know how you said you were going to ‘school me on some queer shit’ earlier?” I asked. “I’m gonna hold you to that. I’ve literally been writing things down all summer. Things like PGPs and what should I say when someone asks me how I identify. And honestly, I don’t know much about trans stuff, either. Everyone else seems to know all the things but all I know is that I’m not straight.”</p> <p>“Damn, mama. We’ve got a lot to talk about then,” Ava said. She cracked her knuckles. “Lemme go get the rest of that sangria.”</p> <p>For the next few hours, we lay out on her bed, sipping sangria. Ava answered my questions. Ava didn’t like the term preferred gender pronouns.</p> <p>“Whatever pronouns a person chooses, if they choose any at all, are their right. Not a fucking preference,” she said.</p> <p>...Before this summer, I’d never considered there was anything beyond he or she. Or that folks could experience a multitude of genders within their person, like what?!</p> <p>“Why not just ask someone straight up if they’re trans?” I asked.</p> <p>“Girl, how rude do you plan to be in this life?” she questioned, stretching out on her big-ass bed. “Your one job is to just accept what a person feels comfortable sharing about themselves. No one owes you info on their gender, body parts, or sexuality.”</p>
225	<p>“But, like, I’m out here assuming girls have vaginas and I like vaginas a lot. And if I was in the process of hooking up with a girl and she didn’t have a vagina, I would feel a type of way, I think,” I admitted, face in my hands.</p> <p>...“What?” I asked. “Shame her? No, I’d feel awkward as hell. I don’t know what it is to be transgender, but I do know what it’s like to be treated like shit for the type of body you have and I wouldn’t wanna do that to anyone in the world, you know.”</p>

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228	My white privilege spewed out, all over, onto you. I'm really fucking sorry about that.
230	"We are so much more than Harlowe can even comprehend. Her consistent linking of genitals to gender as an absolute is violent as hell. It's a closed fist instead of open arms, you know? And besides," she added, staring at herself unflinching in the mirror, "womanhood is radical enough for anyone who dares to claim it."
232	"Mom told me that I was going through a phase just like you did. She said that you had a lady friend once but now you're married to Uncle Lenny and so my gayness isn't permanent either."
233	"Yes, bi. Of course. That tiny word feels so good. Do us bis get a parade too?"
234	The CQ crew expected its people to honor their no-white-folks rule, and anyone who tried to circumvent it lost their respect and invitation to the next party. Shit sounded mad secretive and exclusive, like gay Masons or some shit. ... "I don't know, Ava. Don't you feel weird going to a party where a young, political, good-hearted white person, like your dad when he was younger, wouldn't be able to attend?" ... "No, I don't feel weird. You are just looking to make all the room for white people, aren't you?" Ava asked.
237	"Well, hello. I've never met a Juliet before. I'm Florencio and my pronouns are she and they."
239	They dropped phrases like radical politics, gender essentialism, and government-sanctioned inequality in between conversations about silver lipstick and the importance of self-care. Each cluster of humans wanted to take on the world and reimagine it.
240	"We're here to chill, get sick haircuts, and dance. But let's not forget our fallen camaradas who've been brutalized by police and lovers or left for dead in the street. My fellow trans women, I will not forget you! We will not forget your names. We will not forget being discarded by our families, being homeless and used and taunted. Bullied, murdered, oppressed for being brown, Black, Asian, for being queers, faggots, dykes, genderless renegades, trans warriors, for all our glory. We are not like those fake, fancy gays from Queer as Folk or Will and Fucking Grace! And we will never be them. We will never assimilate. Basura! The capitalist system that favors whiteness and wealth over all has denied us the right to live well, to be well, and to love. We won't let them win. We will riot and party and honor our ancestors, and no one can stop us. Glory be to la madre, Sylvia Rivera; la Virgen de Guadalupe; and la reina, Selena Quintanilla-Pérez. And to you, my people, my Clipper Queerz, Luz Ángel loves you, if no one else does."
242	I hadn't met one person at the party that fit into the regular, straight, normal version of what society wanted them . . . wanted us to be. Gender-wise alone, it was as if the spectrum of the galaxy, with all its manifestations of human beings, beautifully imploded and all the people here were imbued with its majesty.
244	"Because, well, at least to me, masculinity is forever linked to the feminine and to all other forms of gender expression. It's only damaging and violent because we've elevated it above everything else. Society allows masculine people, specifically

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	white men, to exert tremendous power without consequence, and that's where the trauma comes in. It's not masculinity in and of itself," Florencio said.
245	<p>"I'm afraid of looking like a dyke," I said.</p> <p>"Are you a dyke?"</p> <p>"I think so."</p> <p>"Then no matter what you do with your hair, you're gonna look like a dyke," Blue Lips said.</p>
247	I looked fierce, fucking gay as hell, queer even. Shit, maybe I was queer too. Whatever I was or however I decided to identify, the cut was rad.
248	And when Blue Lips found me in the water and reached for me, I didn't run away. And when they kissed me, I kissed back.
253	We'd cry about how she'd stereotyped my life story and how it was all connected to her racism.
268	Like, but here it was all happening around me and there was no Cosmo quiz to take on how to know whether to ditch your possibly racist, possibly ex-mentor, older white lesbian friend, you know?
279	<p>"Can I kiss you, Juliet?"</p> <p>I nodded. Kira leaned over me and kissed me. Her lips never left mine. What kind of kisses were these? Kira and I swapped secrets and bottom-lip bites until the stars fell into formation in the sky.</p> <p>...Her hands found their way under my bra, into my pants, and her lips kissed all the bare parts of my flesh.</p> <p>...I didn't stop her when she touched between my thighs, past my pink boy shorts.</p> <p>...I bit her neck to keep the sounds between us.</p> <p>...We counted the constellations and smoked the last joint.</p>
283	<p>"My issues with Harlowe run deep. She sees a society that enforces a patriarchal system of beliefs. This system imposes itself on her body and lifestyle. Therefore it's corrupt and must be destroyed, right?"</p> <p>"But what's missing from the fist in her fight is any sort of racial awareness. That erasure validates whiteness, frames narratives of people of color around poverty and violence, and propels her into perpetuating the very structures she's trying to dismantle. But I'm not here to make space for good white people. There've been times when I've needed to distance myself from Harlowe and people who love her."</p>
291	<p>I needed to stop smoking cigarettes and maybe even weed. I prayed to Father Mother God that if I made it through this hike, I'd quit one (probably cigarettes, please, Father Mother God, don't make me quit weed).</p> <p>..."Stupid tree huggers," or her favorite, "punk-ass tree-hugging liberals."</p>
294	<p>"Juliet, I am a racist fucking moron and any white person living in this damn country, if any of us tell you otherwise, is a liar and not to be trusted. You can be white and poor and racist as hell and wear your Confederate flags, and there's rich white people who hide their racism behind homeowner's associations and luxury condo income requirements. And then there are hippie gentrifying, well-intentioned whites like me, and none of us are better than the other. But, like, just know that I really do love you and I'm sorry about all of it."</p>

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	<p>...“You love me. You’re sorry. And hey, white folks are racist. Hate to break it to you?”</p> <p>...“And what sucks is that I know that you know that. Deep down you also know you get a pass. Maybe not from Maxine and Zaira, but from every white lady in that room. All of them just looked at me all sad. Like as if they were ready to ‘discover’ their own little lesbian Latina from whatever hood and make themselves a savior too.”</p>
296	<p>“You’re not anyone’s proof. My work should hold up on its own merits, on the integrity and care that I put into it. I think calling out racism in other white folks has made me feel like I’m above it and that . . . that’s just a big old mess. I’ve messed up with you, Max, Zaira. I have my work cut out for me. I hope one day you’ll forgive me.”</p>
309	<p>Yeah, I would have taken up all my women/femme/non-binary author friends on their publishing offers. It would have been really cool to have that connection to deeply pro-dyke, pro-Latina, pro-feminist, anti-white racist publishers, you know?</p>
310	<p>"Magic Stick" by Lil' Kim & 50 Cent was on the radio and I didn't even know the difference between gender expression and gender assigned at birth.</p>
311	<p>Personally, it's taken me a long time to realize that I can disconnect from harmful folks, from networks that elevate white people's comfort over the needs of Black people, indigenous people, all people of color.</p> <p>... Regarding ally-ship, everyone should read the article "Accomplices not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex" via Indigenous Action Media. Their main point is that we need "accomplices not allies."</p> <p>For me, no one can be an ally.</p> <p>...But allies are meaningless if we're not taking actions. A straight white actress posting a pride flag on her Instagram isn't gonna save LGBTQ teens from being homeless, you know what I mean? I wanna know if you're gonna take a bullet for us, if you're gonna put your body in the way of an assault and throw your vote on the line for better policies for Black Indigenous POC, LGBTQ folks, disabled folks, all of us. Walk through the storm with me, otherwise you don't deserve the sunshine on the other side.</p> <p>...We gotta share our money, resources, homes, energy, and histories with each other, no matter what.</p>
312	<p>When my gender presentation went from tomboy femme to butch dyke, my whole world changed kinda. The same places that took my resume beforehand were now not interested in hiring a visibly queer person. And by default, I was also failing as a Latina. Not hot, not high femme, and not trying to cater to any man or patriarchal system.</p>
313	<p>7. Do you have any advice for aspiring writers, particularly those who are marginalized because of their race or sexuality?</p> <p>Take all that pain and write it out, dance it out, fuck it out, love it out.</p>

Profanity	Count
Ass	41
Bitch	8
Cunt	5
Dyke	38
Fag/Faggot	2
Fuck	100
Goddamn	2
Piss	1
Pussy	33
Shit	71
Tit	1