

Radial Gradient

By Jasmine Sharma

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CHARACTERS

| | |
|---------|-------------------------------|
| ANJANI | 21, South Asian. Perceptive. |
| MELANIE | 24, Biracial. Postive. |
| GIGI | 21, White-passing. Defensive. |

SETTING

2020. A Psychology Department at an elite University in America.
 2017. Sorority row and dorms at the same elite University.

NOTES

When casting, it is understood that race and ethnicity is a spectrum.

“/“ indicates overlap.

“-“ indicates a quick cutoff.

“()” indicates whispering.

Bolded text indicates that the text is stressed more than text overlapping with it.

There is musicality in “Oh, Hm, Wow, Ah, Um.”

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QUOTE

“I cannot continue to emotionally exhaust myself trying to get this message across, while also toeing a very precarious line that tries not to implicate any one white person in their role of perpetuating structural racism, lest they character assassinate me.”

-Reni Eddo-Lodge, *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*.

“Sometimes you are erased before you are given the choice of stating who you are.”

-Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*.

Scene I

2017, Sorority Row.

A song like "Paper Planes" by M.I.A plays.

Gigi and Anjani wear winter coats, but their bare legs reveal that they are in dresses.

Gigi puts mascara on Anjani.

Anjani accidentally sneezes, causing Gigi to slip up and smudge the side of Anjani's face.

Gigi licks the palm of her hand and rubs the smudge off.

They wait, bumping butts in boredom.

The sound of strong wind.

GIGI

Fuck mother *fuck* me / what is taking so long?

ANJANI

It's *damn* cold / out here-

GIGI

Does it look like I'm getting a rash? / These bumps on my neck are-

ANJANI

I'm getting ashy-

GIGI

Your face is pretty and / it's staying dewy so you're so fine-

ANJANI

No, this is isn't dewey, this is wet / eczema.

GIGI

You look good-

ANJANI

I'm freaking *cold*.

GIGI

Fucking *freezing*.

Let's leave.

Let's just ditch, right now.

ANJANI

What, and go back to our crappy dorm with its crappy heat / lamp?

GIGI

And our crappy BONG!

ANJANI

Shh, that's not funny!

(Someone inside might hear / and then-)

GIGI

Then what, blacklist us from Kappa?

I'm cutting this house as soon as possible.

Someone on Greek Rank said they saw a MAGA hat on the coat rack-

ANJANI

No they didn't-

GIGI

And yet, they did!

Kappa's a bunch of butt plugs.

ANJANI

Butt plugs?

GIGI

Don't be a kink killer.

Like, I haven't had sex yet, but like, maybe when I'm fifty.

ANJANI

Understood.

GIGI

Basically, yes to sex positivity, no to MAGA Republicans.

And regular Republicans.

ANJANI

...That hat could be a joke though?

Or like, belong to the one bad egg in the bunch?

Maybe they're not socially progressive but financially conservative!

GIGI

Okay, one: it's *fiscally* conservative.

Two: You're either socially liberal or you don't give a shit.

And not giving a shit? Not progressive.

ANJANI

I didn't know / that-

GIGI

And it's *fiscally* conservative, not *financially*.

ANJANI

Okay! Thank you, Gigi, I got it.

GIGI

Just saying!

If they're gonna judge us on if we're One Of Them in four minutes, we have to judge them right back.

ANJANI

You're so good at this.

GIGI

I just know the rules.

Kali was everyone's alpha bid when she Rushed.

ANJANI

Yeah, yeah, "Queen Kali, everyone's Ultimate Ultimate-"

GIGI

Listen, she had Recruitment *Chairs* fully stalking her Insta and liking old posts-

As a way around the rules, but still, you know, pointed.

ANJANI

Wait, why?

GIGI

To let her know they were watching her.

Subtle, but a compliment.

ANJANI

Should I make my stuff public?

GIGI

Trust me, if you're Rushing, they probably already found it.

Melanie joins them, dressed in sweats and a warmer coat.

MELANIE

You guys have to tone it down. I'm getting every *single* word from the other side of the / door-

GIGI

Melanie! My clit is about to freeze / off!

MELANIE

Shh-

You can't say "clit"-

ANJANI

Are we going in soon?

MELANIE

They're running a few minutes behind.

ANJANI

Excuse / me?

MELANIE

Someone in the last set used the bathroom-

GIGI

(Selfish.)

MELANIE

Y'all should be allowed inside / soon.

ANJANI

But it's single digits cold!

MELANIE
Here, come in-

*Melanie opens her coat.
Anjani and Gigi squish in on either side of her headfirst.
Gigi pops out.*

GIGI
Mel?

MELANIE
Yes, little turtle?

GIGI
Is this your house?

MELANIE
No guessing!
I can't tell you my chapter / until after Rush is over.

GIGI
“Until after Rush is over.” Bet.
But like...are you a Kappa?

Anjani pops out of Mel's coat.

ANJANI
No, she's not.

MELANIE
How do you know?

ANJANI
You think she would stay in a MAGA house?

MELANIE
Shh-
Sorry, who's the MAGA house again?

GIGI

Kappa.

They got the hat. Period red, coat rack.

I heard about it from Greek Rank.

That's the secret rush blog, Anj-

ANJANI

(I know.)

MELANIE

Oh come on-

Some scorned girl who didn't get her first pick probably posted that as revenge-

GIGI

MAGA hat on the coat rack?

Pretty specific for a lie. Feels more like a warning for the POC Rushing-

MELANIE

I know there used to be this *idea* that Kappa's racist, but that was an unfair stereotype.

GIGI

Stereotypes are there for a reason.

ANJANI

Gi?

GIGI

I'm not saying they're *good*.

They're just based in *something*.

That's why they're so hard to break.

MELANIE

Well, the sorority stereotypes aren't accurate.

But then again, I'm just your RC, who is *in* an actual sorority.

What do I know about what it's like on the inside, right?

GIGI

I don't know-

ANJANI
Melanie does. That's the point.

GIGI
Kissass.

ANJANI
I'm not a kissass.

Gigi's knits her eyebrows together.

GIGI
I was just trying to have a constructive conversation, jeez.
...
So Mel.
Are you like, Delta then? Theta?

MELANIE
Shh-!

GIGI
I can't tell if her face is twitching, / is it twitching?

ANJANI
Ooo I dunno. / How about Gamma? Pi Phi?
An Alpha?

MELANIE
Guys!

GIGI
Oh oh oh she's smiling-

MELANIE
Because you're both being crazy.

A bell chimes.

MELANIE
That's go time ladies!

GIGI

Take my coat? I don't want them to read the label-
They judge the brand, Anj.

ANJANI

Shit this is Marshalls-
Take mine too?

Melanie takes both of their coats.

MELANIE

Have fun in there! Smile!

A song like "Stronger" by Raveena plays in the transition.

Scene 2

2020, The Psychology Department.

A room with no edges. It has a pod-like feel to it.

Someone somewhere worked hard to keep these walls white.

Melanie reviews some notes from her notebook.

She cups her face in both hands. She breathes in and out.

When she is ready, she snaps into presentation mode.

She references every now and then to her notebook, but she is confident, grounded, well-rehearsed.

This presentation is her bitch.

MELANIE

Thank you all for being here.

I have been waiting for this day since-

Well, since orientation! And I mean as an *undergrad*.

I'd like to start by apologizing for popping up in all of your office hours unannounced for *six years* now!

Isn't that right, Professor Saunders?

He's nodding.

Melanie clears her throat.

She reads directly from her notebook:

MELANIE

"Many little girls dream of the day they'll defend their dissertation, finally earning that special little prefix, that sweet honorific-
'Doctor.'

And I will be the first PhD graduate produced from this department with a focus on *multicultural psychology*."

A trailblazer. Me.

No small feat...right, Professor?

...

Let's be Powerpoint Professional, shall we?

Melanie closes her notebook and begins the powerpoint, which projects onto the pod-like walls.

Projected is a map of the United States with Active Hate Groups.

MELANIE

Our school is not in a region of the United States that typically houses Active Hate Groups.

Yet, our student body comes from all over, from all walks of life, from all systems of...belief.

What does that mean?

It means when hate, racism, happens on campus, we lack resources for dealing with it.

It means at a Predominantly White Institution, navigating hate, racism, becomes an extra course-load for students of color.

Melanie clicks to the next slide.

Projected are various graphs and charts.

MELANIE

As you know, I have been studying race-based trauma, but have been unable to publish my research.

My very detailed, arguably herculean research.

I have been informed that purely observational studies no longer cut it.

They lack-

How did you say it, Professor Saunders?

...Yes...“sex appeal”.

Well! I propose that I make lemonade out of-
Lemons.

Melanie clicks to the next slide.

It is Gigi's headshot, captioned with information from her GreekRank Rush profile.

She looks young.

MELANIE

This individual is mentioned as Prospective Participant A in your handouts.

Her apartment was-

Well, that isn't my information to share.

Yet.

Not without a waiver.

But I can assure you, she is a victim of a campus hate crime.

Prospective Participant B is-

Melanie clicks to the next slide.

*It is Anjani's headshot, captioned with information from her GreekRank Rush profile.
She looks young.*

MELANIE

This young woman. She shares a history with Participant A.
Participant C is none other than-

*Melanie clicks to the next slide.
It is an arrow pointing to where Melanie is standing.*

MELANIE

Myself.

I am proposing an Observer as Participant study.
As protocol dictates, I will be utilizing a room with a two-way glass, open for all advisors who may want to check-in.

*The house lights flicker.
Melanie clicks to the next slide.
It is a photo of Anjani and Gigi huddled inside Melanie's coat.
It is their Rush Group Photo from 2017.*

MELANIE

The three of us were involved in a systematical selection process called "Recruitment" or "Rush."

The selection process is a microcosm of racial profiling.

*Melanie clicks to the next slide.
It is a slideshow of GreekRank headshots.
It is intentional that the photos of women of color are skipped over more quickly than the photos of white women.*

MELANIE

I will be using their rush experience as context for this study.
I predict that in being part of a system built for whiteness, they have contributed to it-

Blind to their own complicity.

I will now take questions.

...

Don't worry, I have the best intentions-

MELANIE

I was involved with Greek Life too.

I was their Recruitment Counselor, their point person, their leader, during that confusing, frustrating week.

This is my redemption.

Our campus has a problem and I happen to have a study.

We can help each other.

A song like, "Rose in Harlem" by Teyana Taylor plays in the transition.

Scene 3

2020, The Psychology Department.

Melanie sets out a ring of five chairs in the room.

Melanie straightens one chair.

She angles it.

She decides that an angled chair looks stupid.

She cups her face in both hands, breathing deeply in, and out.

Anjani enters.

ANJANI

I'm flattered that you called me / for this.

MELANIE

Of course.

ANJANI

And thought of me.

MELANIE

Why wouldn't I?

ANJANI

I mean, we haven't really seen each other since I dropped.

MELANIE

You never pledged in the first place.

ANJANI

Not officially, you're right.

Just-

I didn't know you were still on campus?

MELANIE

Oh I've *been* here.

I'm on the grind for that doctoral in multiculti psych-

ANJANI

Have you been back at Alpha?

MELANIE

I try to avoid it as much as possible.

ANJANI

So you deactivated then?

MELANIE

Mm.

ANJANI

You should've texted.

We could have gotten coffee / or like, lunch.

MELANIE

You're right, life just-

ANJANI

And I mean that.

I'm not saying it in the way people say they wanna see you and then never text-

So you're left wondering if you should have followed up-

But now a month has gone by and you don't want to look desperate-

You were just looking for someone to sit with at Pizza Shack on a Tuesday.

MELANIE

...Sure.

/ Sorry-?

ANJANI

So / who else is coming to this?

MELANIE

Oh-

Well-

Ah-

Gigi enters.

GIGI

Whoa.

ANJANI
Hey-

MELANIE
Okay, we're met!

GIGI
There's only two of us here-?

MELANIE
This is everyone!

ANJANI
On the phone, you made it sound like / more people would be-

MELANIE
You know what!
I'm going to grab a water bottle, does anyone want one too?

ANJANI
I / guess, sure.

GIGI
Plastic bottles are not sustainable.

MELANIE
Awesome!
Take a seat, be comfortable!

Melanie exits.

ANJANI
...

GIGI
...

ANJANI
It's good to see you.

GIGI
Yeah.
Did she-

ANJANI
Call?
Yeah.

GIGI
She called me too.
Why did she call you?

ANJANI
I don't know-
Why you?

GIGI
I mean-
I'm the Girl in the University Email.

ANJANI
...

GIGI
Which is just so much less interesting than like, *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*.

ANJANI
...Or *The Girl Who Played with Fire*.

GIGI
Or *The Girl Who Kicked the Whore's Nest*.

ANJANI
Hornet. Hornet's Nest.

GIGI
...Oh.
Been a weird two weeks.

...
Why are you here?

ANJANI
Mel called-

GIGI
But why did you come?

ANJANI
Um, I was curious.

GIGI
Did you know I was coming?

ANJANI
No?
And...I'd like to stay, if you're okay with that.

GIGI
...
Why wouldn't I be?

ANJANI
I mean, because we're not / friends anymore-

GIGI
It's a free country.

ANJANI
Okay.
About the thing-
From the email-
...Are you-

GIGI
I'm *fine*.
Like other people in other places are dying.

ANJANI
Right.

GIGI
And fleeing wars / and AIDS isn't cured yet.

ANJANI
Definitely, that's true.

GIGI
Don't you care about AIDS?

ANJANI
Yes, I obviously care about AIDS.

GIGI
I thought more people would be here.
I was just gonna listen.

ANJANI
Silence is complicity.

GIGI
Who'd you learn that one from, huh?

ANJANI
Hey, do you know if Mel deactivated from Alpha-?
Tryna / sus out if-

GIGI
Before you start trash talking Greek Life, know that I'm here representing PHA.

ANJANI
...Not like, yourself?

GIGI
I mean I'm still *president* of The Panhellenic Association.
So anything I do-
Kind of reflects on them.
Not that they wouldn't be okay with me coming here talking about it.
They don't take what happened lightly.

ANJANI

What happened to *you* lightly.

Melanie enters with water bottles.

MELANIE

Let's get started?!

Thanks for coming today, ladies.

It's so nice to see all of you-

GIGI

Again, there's two / of us.

MELANIE

I wanted to keep these sessions intimate.

Melanie begins a powerpoint, which projects onto the pod-like walls.

The first slide is made up of several icons under "racism" from the The Noun Project.

MELANIE

There is implicit bias built into institutions preserving structural racism-

ANJANI

In regular words?

MELANIE

The University is really white!

ANJANI

(Got it.)

MELANIE

The ultimate goal of my whole career is to create resources for POC students in white spaces-

But that's long term.

Today, my goal, and the goal of my dissertation, is to prove there is a problem at all.

ANJANI

Was that up for debate?

I just feel like that's common knowledge.

MELANIE

Well, it's not, apparently!

So today, we're going to figure out how trauma informs your relationships!

GIGI

(I'm not traumatized-)

MELANIE

This research is going to be so important for future students of color.

Who do not have an easy time navigating all-white spaces.

Anjani, that's why you dropped Alpha, right?

ANJANI

I-

MELANIE

Sorry, you never pledged, right.

But that was why?

ANJANI

Sure?

MELANIE

And Gigi, don't you want tools to deal with your current trauma?

Gigi's knits her eyebrows together.

GIGI

I don't have trauma.

MELANIE

Sure.

Okay, well don't you want to create inclusivity tools for others then?

Wasn't that your platform when you ran for PHA president?

GIGI

I actually haven't been able to get anything...um, real done-
Nationals bureaucracy and all.
Just a lot of emails. Statements of solidarity.

MELANIE

Then don't you want redemption?

GIGI

I don't need-

MELANIE

Because I do.
I think about what I've perpetuated through my own Greek Life involvement-

GIGI

I'm not here to talk about Greek Life?

MELANIE

Yet.
But let's reframe:
I mean, how do the spray-painted slurs on your apartment make you feel?

GIGI

...Like shit?

MELANIE

I want to give more depth to that-
To that "shit."
Because the Gigi I know puts up a fight.
About everything!
She says something.

GIGI

...

MELANIE

I want to give you the words to articulate "shit" clearer.
You can trust me.
Both of you.

ANJANI

If Gigi is okay with it, I'm down to stay.

GIGI

...Whatever.

MELANIE

Thank you.

Real quick, here are some waivers for you to sign, just general University policies-

A song like "Go Off" by M.I.A plays.

*Projected onto the walls are pages and pages of
Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) forms.*

Melanie clicks through them, eyeing the girls.

Anjani and Gigi sign physical waiver after waiver.

Scene 4

2017, Anjani and Gigi's dorm room.

They sort through a huge pile of clothes, trying to decide what to wear.

ANJANI

I thought I was turning into a sociopath.
Every word out of my mouth? Fabricated.

GIGI

I started repeating conversations on purpose.

ANJANI

How?

GIGI

I came up with an intro by house three:
“Hi! I’m Gigi! Amazing to meet you!” and then I hit them with-
“Kiss, Marry, Kill: avocados, printed pants, Pure Barre!”

ANJANI

No you don’t.
You do not say that!

GIGI

Well I wasn’t gonna say “fuck” and get Blacklisted.
Oh, that one!

Gigi points to the garment in Anjani’s hands.

ANJANI

This is literally yours.

GIGI

Well, it’s in your mess pile, so it’s fair game.
But obviously tell girls in there you’re wearing my shit, so they forgive and rerank me in case I fuck up a conversation.

ANJANI

They don’t rank us.

GIGI

Anjani, are you high?

ANJANI

Not right now, thought about it.

But they don't put us in an order. It's just based on, / on-

GIGI

On what?

ANJANI

Like, GPA? Interests?

At the prospective interest thing they said that they don't judge solely on appearance here?

GIGI

But *subconsciously* that's the biggest way they're judging us.

You don't think they notice our coats? Heels?

Our hair?

ANJANI

But it's an organization. There are adults involved. They can't-

GIGI

Babe-

Just stick with me and you're fine, Kali told me all the tips.

No need to go to interest meetings.

ANJANI

You're right.

Will you fix my make-up before we go?

GIGI

Please! Where's your palette?

ANJANI

Here-

Anjani presents a drugstore eyeshadow square.

GIGI

Anjani, you're an eighteen year old woman. You need to have a palette.
It's like the tampon of your make-up bag.

ANJANI

Tampons are the tampons of my make-up bag-

GIGI

Unacceptable.

We're taking the campus shuttle to the mall next weekend.

Close!

Anjani closes her eyes.

GIGI

Gold goes so well with your skin tone.

Lucky hoe.

Anjani opens her eyes.

ANJANI

Wait, can you do pink?

GIGI

Why, gold looks good on you-

ANJANI

Just-

The other girls wear pink.

GIGI

I already started.

ANJANI

...Okay.

Anjani closes her eyes again.

GIGI

You're so lucky gold works for you.

GIGI
I look cheap and washed out.
On my sister? Perfect, Kali glows.
I got my dad's coloring.

Anjani opens her eyes.

ANJANI
Wait I wanna see pictures of the fam-

GIGI
Keep your eyes closed!

Anjani closes her eyes again.

ANJANI
Sorry.

GIGI
All the aunts in my family are always like, "You're so blessed, God gave you a creamy, milky face."
Like, what do you say to that?
"Yogurt was what I was going for, thanks!"

ANJANI
Wait shut up my grandparents are so messed up with the Fair and Lovely shit too-

GIGI
What's that?

ANJANI
It's soap that bleaches you.
For / "yogurt-y complexion-"

GIGI
I'm sorry, *what?*

ANJANI
I know, it's fucked.
It's embarrassing to talk about-

ANJANI
For the culture.

GIGI
But bleach? Fuck me.
How is that even allowed?

ANJANI
I guess it's the same as self-tanner though?
You're still changing your skin color.

GIGI
Eek. At me.

Anjani opens her eyes, Gigi pauses applying shadow.

ANJANI
You don't-
Do you?

GIGI
Not anymore!
But I did a few times in high school.
Oh my God, once I went too hard-
There is this insane photo of me from my cousin's wedding-

ANJANI
Your mom let you brown up for a *wedding*?

GIGI
Close!

Anjani closes her eyes.

GIGI
...I made her cry.
I was like, "I just want to look like you and Kali and the rest of the family!"
And she didn't know what to do with that.
...
But also, those were her blonde years?

GIGI

Now she's all, "We have our own culture!"

But back then I mean...she was trying to look like Lori and Susan from work.

So why was it so crazy I wanted to look like-

I don't know.

...

I should call her.

Did your mom pull that shit? When she immigrated here?

Anjani opens her eyes.

ANJANI

She was born in Pennsylvania.

GIGI

Oh, was your dad the one born in India then? I forget.

ANJANI

Nope. Maine.

GIGI

Oh.

My bad-

ANJANI

It's okay-

GIGI

No, like, really eek at me / totally eek-

ANJANI

Sure, just-

Let's just drop it.

GIGI

Yeah, absolutely.

Anjani looks at her eye makeup in the eyeshadow's mirror.

ANJANI

I'm just gonna add a little pink.

A song like, "ICY GIRL" by Saweetie plays.

Scene 5

2020, The Psychology Department.

Melanie's powerpoint slides project onto the walls.

Flashing images of stickers and posters posted around campus with messages like, "Be an Active Ally!" and "I See You! I Hear You!" and "It's Okay to feel Overwhelmed!"

MELANIE

Psychological responses are processed from a place of fight or flight versus a place of defensiveness.

Identity privilege plays a huge role in it.

So!

With that in mind, let's name some of the identities we have, and how that may color our perspective-

Pun intended.

GIGI

...

ANJANI

...

MELANIE

I can give an example?

So, I'm a woman. The psych department is mostly male.

When presenting my research, my work-

I "over articulate" in order to be taken seriously.

But!

That is also a privilege, me being incredibly well-educated-

Brilliant.

Because in different rooms, I weaponize intelligence-

Which sometimes pisses off my mother.

GIGI

I mean, I'm white-passing. Passing privilege is real.

But I'm still POC, and really value my heritage. It's how I identify and-

And I feel like that gets glazed over.

MELANIE

And would you say that has impacted your perspective?

GIGI
Uh...yeah?

Melanie writes quickly in her notebook.

MELANIE
("Being white-passing means your perspective is glazed over-")
And Anjani!
How do you identify!

ANJANI
Pretty POC.

MELANIE
That broadly?
If you were to focus in on a more specific-

ANJANI
Well, what are the options?
Once, I filled in the Native American bubble on some state test-
Oh! The third grade geometry proficiency exam-
It was November, we had just learned about Thanksgiving-
My teacher sometimes called them "Indians" in class, the Native Americans?
"Indians."
We learned about the Indians and the pilgrims being besties and making friendship
bracelets-
nothing about the rape or smallpox, but you know-
They had PUMPKIN PIE! so that was awesome for them, I guess.
I checked "Asian" on the SAT, don't worry.
But "Asian" in the US means "East-Asian".
If there was a bubble for it, I'd check "South-Asian".
It's like a puzzle.

MELANIE
Or a...fluctuating gradient?

ANJANI
Nah-
I feel more like a color than a culture anyway.
I usually just check "Other".

MELANIE
(So you feel othered-)

Melanie writes quickly in her notebook.

GIGI
Wait, you really don't-?
Sorry.

MELANIE
Did you have a question?

GIGI
For Anjani...-

MELANIE
Go ahead! I may be facilitating, but this is an open discussion.
Take the space!

GIGI
Um, just-
Taking pride in your culture is so important? You really don't care about holidays?
I mean art, food, *language*-
It's like, who you are?

ANJANI
I *only* speak English. I was born here, I've never even been out of the country-

MELANIE
Also, what you're talking about, Gigi, is ethnicity, which is different from race.

GIGI
But they're related-

MELANIE
Race is skin color, hair, facial features, perceived constructions.
Ethnicity is shared practices, traditions, art/food/language.

ANJANI
And I don't even know those traditions and rules.

ANJANI

I look the way I do-
But I'm American?
There's never a bubble for that.

Melanie writes quickly in her notebook.

GIGI

But celebrating what makes you different is-

ANJANI

Different *how?* From who?
I wanna be "different" for being smart or for being funny.
For something I think I am.

GIGI

...So, you think you're funny.

MELANIE

Let's try a centering activity!
Maybe a guided meditation?
Close your eyes.

*Anjani closes her eyes.
Seeing Anjani, Gigi closes her eyes.
Melanie waits until their eyes are closed.
On her signal, the house lights flicker.
Melanie stands, eyes closed.*

MELANIE

Visualize:
You are in your body. You're wearing what you're wearing, walking down University Drive. The sun is out, but not harsh.
You're on your way to class.
You run into a friend.
Say, "hey, friend."
Say it.

They don't.

MELANIE

Fine.

Well, from this friend you learn that another student's off campus apartment has been vandalized.

You react.

What is happening in your body.

GIGI

...

ANJANI

It feels like Gigi should answer first?

Everyone opens their eyes.

MELANIE

It's important to refrain from putting people on the spot in front of the group-

GIGI

There are two. Of us. Here.

MELANIE

Eyes closed!

They all close their eyes.

MELANIE

Take your time.

GIGI

Like, numb, maybe?

Shock, I don't know.

MELANIE

Think of people, places, details from that day.

Safely trigger an emotion memory recall.

Get specific.

Gigi opens her eyes, clearly irritated.

GIGI

I don't know, what nouns do you associate with racism?

MELANIE

I would be more comfortable sharing without feeling that Look you're giving me.

Gigi closes her eyes.

MELANIE

Being on the school bus with Tommy Randall.

Hair straighteners, Rachel Dolezal-

...Recruitment meetings.

With dress codes. "Jewel toned tops and nude heels required."

Nude for whites.

Looking for heels that are nude for Blacks.

Feeling something between sadness and rage, looking for a shade of nude between-

A shade for biracial.

Melanie cups her face in her hands.

MELANIE

It makes my cheeks flush.

Anjani and Gigi open their eyes.

They look at Melanie.

GIGI

Wait, yeah-

Melanie opens her eyes.

GIGI

My cheeks get really warm when I think about my...encounter.

They feel the way they do when it's like I'm gonna throw up.

I was nauseous. And um, shaky-

But not in a nervous way, in like, an angry way.

The backs of my eyes felt hot-

But not like I was gonna cry-

Something-

MELANIE
Between?

GIGI
Between.
And I didn't want anyone to know.
Like my sisters-
When they're with me, I want them to see a carefree Gamma like them, not-

Anjani scoffs.

GIGI
What?

ANJANI
Sorry.
That was rude. It just came out-

GIGI
Yeah, it *was* rude.

ANJANI
You thought about your *sisters*?

GIGI
Some of us stayed in Greek Life and give a shit about the people in it.

ANJANI
Your *first* thought?
Out of all the other thoughts?

GIGI
Why is that so crazy?

ANJANI
You just said all that stuff about being so proud of your culture-
But Greek Life is the most racist institution here-

GIGI
You Rushed too, if I remember / correctly-

ANJANI

Yeah, and then I looked around and got the fuck out-

GIGI

Well maybe that's a reflection on you and not the total organization-
I for one have had a positive experience-

ANJANI

Please, you never wanted to blend in so bad until we Rushed.

GIGI

Me?

If I remember, you were the one painting her eyelids Caucasian Pink-

ANJANI

I like pink-

GIGI

You like looking like them-

ANJANI

And you don't?

Melanie writes quickly in her notebook.

GIGI

Don't write that down-

MELANIE

Ignore me, continue!

ANJANI

I'd actually like to see what you're writing-

GIGI

Me too.

MELANIE

Just some shorthand for my notes!

Gigi, you were talking about your sisters-

GIGI

Right-

I thought about my sisters, and then I got nauseous.

Wait-

I mean, I was nauseous and then I thought-

You can put what I said before in your notes.

MELANIE

Just speak freely!

GIGI

I did-

I'm done answering the question now.

How about you, huh?

What are you feeling, thinking about my quirky little hate crime.

ANJANI

Upset, obviously.

Like, I want to be there for you, but don't know how.

I'm sorry.

What did-

(If I can ask?)

MELANIE

Go ahead!

ANJANI

What did it say? The spray paint?

GIGI

Why, so you can judge for yourself how bad I get to feel?

ANJANI

Not at all, I was just curious if-

GIGI

I'm not trauma porn.

You can just take me at my word that it was racist and wrong.

ANJANI

I do.

I just wanted to say then that I'm sorry the University email didn't call it a hate crime.

That's what it was.

They should've named it.

GIGI

Oh.

ANJANI

They're butt plugs.

Gigi releases a short smirk.

ANJANI

I'm on your side-

GIGI

That's a first.

A song like, "Why Don't You" by Cleo Sol plays.

Scene 6

2017, Anjani and Gigi's dorm..

Gigi lies down, Anjani types on a laptop.

ANJANI

I'm so close to finishing this webassign I promise-
Ready to walk over to the sorority quad in two more questions-

GIGI

Which house are we going to first?

ANJANI

Alpha? Maybe?

GIGI

...I don't think I can fake it tonight.
I might drop.

ANJANI

If you do, I'll drop too.

GIGI

...

*Anjani looks at Gigi and notices her discomfort.
Anjani closes her laptop.*

ANJANI

What's going on?

GIGI

There's this girl in my gender studies *and* history classes?
I know she's in Alpha because she always wearing the sweatshirt.
Today, she was sharing one of her classic hot take opinions-
She fully thinks she's enrolled in White Feminist 101.
Hello, it's an *African American* History class, watch yourself.

ANJANI

Oh *shit!*

GIGI

I know.

Today in class I said this whole thing about how being a woman of color in a predominantly white space means that I benefit from anti-Blackness.

And then right after she was like, “to piggyback on what Ghana said-”

And I was like...

Am I Ghana?

ANJANI

In an *African American History* class?

GIGI

I *know!*

And my name is *Gigi* how much simpler can I make it?

Gigi isn't even my *real name*.

ANJANI

Wait, / what's your name-

GIGI

It's ethnic, we don't need to talk about it.

ANJANI

But-

My name's...

GIGI

And she sits *next to me*.

So I said something-

Because silence is complicity.

I leaned over like this-

Gigi coolly leans over to Anjani.

GIGI

I'm so chill, so casual, and just point out that, “I'm *Gigi*, actually-”

ANJANI

You did not!

GIGI

I did!

And then this hoe had the *audacity* to be like, “Are you calling me a racist? I would never misname POC.”

ANJANI

Oh fuck, Gigi-

GIGI

And I was like, “sorry!”

ANJANI

...Why’d you apologize?

GIGI

I don’t know, just-

I still wanted to be nice. I was nervous!

And it’s all I could think about for the rest of class.

And when we were walking out the door, she was like, “Sorry about before, but you framed that like I was aggressing you, and I felt completely powerless. That was my anxiety talking!”

...

Like, Kali has anxiety too.

She still manages to get through the day without being the worst.

ANJANI

What’d you say?

GIGI

“Ohmigod, you’re so fine.”

ANJANI

...

GIGI

Whatever, Alpha’s racist.

It’s off our lists.

ANJANI

Could be like, she had an off day or something?

GIGI

No, she says crazy stuff in class all the time.

ANJANI

Okay, well maybe she's the one bad egg in Alpha?

Or like, a legacy, so they *had* to let her in because her mom was in it when it was still a problematic organization?

GIGI

...Pretty sure I don't want to be somewhere that passive?

Like, if you're making space for legacy assholes, it is a good place to be?

ANJANI

Yeah, but what if-

GIGI

Why aren't you on my side with this?

I just told you what happened.

ANJANI

I'm just trying to get a clearer picture.

Sorry, you're right.

GIGI

I am right.

But I shouldn't have apologized.

I won't next time.

I'm gonna be firm next time.

I am.

A song like, "Normal Girl" by SZA plays.

Scene 7

2020, The Psychology Department.

Gigi has put her feet up on another chair.

Melanie's phone rings.

MELANIE

Sorry-

My mom keeps calling me-

Even though she knows I'm working.

Anyway!

Talk to me about your communities. Our perspectives are often molded by our first interactions: our families.

Cultural biases are formed by generations of minority communities being put against each other.

Islamophobia in Latinx communities, homophobia in Black communities-

All of the phobias among WASPs.

So what is speaking with your parents like? About race.

ANJANI

I try and avoid it. There's this whole Oppression Olympics with them and my grandparents comparing their own stuff?

And yes, they lived through wars, and I have not.

"I don't even know the half of it."

But that generation just makes everything about them.

MELANIE

"Everything?"

ANJANI

Like-

They're so hardcore Model Minority Myth they won't even look at their own prejudices.

Melanie looks through her notebook notes.

MELANIE

And how do you self-educate yourself to combat those ideologies?

ANJANI

I'm taking Asian American Education with Professor Swati right now?

ANJANI

I'm getting a lot of like, context?
Hope she gets tenured.

MELANIE

Or if we make an official Ethnic Studies department at all!
How about race talks with chosen family? Friends.

ANJANI

Not white ones.

MELANIE

Why is that?

ANJANI

It's a lot of explaining.

Anjani fidgets with a ponytail on her wrist.

ANJANI

Sometimes-

Like, it needs to be spelled out, but with buzz words.

And I don't want to be the mood killer, but-

Hello, *Google*?

But there are still some things I understand that they just don't. Like-

Anjani rubs her wrist.

ANJANI

Like The Look.

MELANIE

Sure.

GIGI

What look?

ANJANI

You know.

The Look. Like-

ANJANI

I'll be in lecture minding my own beeswax in the back-
 And the professor will start talking about 9/11.
 All of a sudden, there's The Look coming from the turned around front row.
 But saying anything that isn't straight patriotism about 9/11 triggers this weird
 discomfort.
 As if maybe I'm a terrorist too.
 But if some white boy challenges Bush, my god, he is a woke warrior.

MELANIE

Would more students from your racial background make that easier?

ANJANI

Sure, I would feel less shitty representing The Race by just existing if there were
 more people from The Race to look at.
 The Look would be easier to field if I stood out less.
 But I don't think the admissions department cares about what I want.

MELANIE

But the psychology department does.
 I care.
 The Look happens with slavery for me-
 (As though the textbook isn't revisionist.)
 Sitting through a powerpoint knowing people are looking at me and not the
 screen-
 K-12, undergrad through now.

ANJANI

Shit, that's every / year-

MELANIE

Every single year.

GIGI

I think I get The Look but from POC.
 And I mean those who don't present white.
 Tangent, but like, POC makes it sound like all people of color are all the *same*
 color.
 Because then people don't always know if I'm white or not?
 Especially during Rush, it's like, "I'm on your side, I promise."

Melanie opens her notebook.

MELANIE

Expand on *that!*

Could you demonstrate?

GIGI

I mean-

The powerpoint suddenly projects a slideshow of Greek Rank photos.

The first photo is a white woman's account picture.

GIGI

So we're in the basement of our house rating PNMs-
(Potential New Members.)

No one is allowed in the chapter room itself unless you have clearance.

Another white woman.

GIGI

That's where all the official decisions are made, so it's just easier to keep it Rush Captains Only.

Another white woman.

GIGI

If a sister slides a note under the door anonymously during a set saying, "Hey, I talked to 'Blank', she made me uncomfortable, I don't see her here-"

A photo of a woman of color.

GIGI

Then we don't take her. We trust our current sister's word.

But then when we get to the end of the night and our whole chapter starts voting, all anyone sees is this girl getting consistent ones out of four.

(One is the highest, four is the lowest.)

So when outsiders are like-

"They don't have any girls of color! What happened?"

No one inside knows why.

GIGI
And I'm like-
"It's not my fault, I'm just following protocol!"
And then I feel The Look.

A set of chapter composites projected, showing all-white membership. They look happy.

GIGI
Everyone's butthole tightens.
Like now.

ANJANI
Okay, but that's The Look in a completely different way.

The powerpoint shuts off.

MELANIE
Let's talk more about this kind of racial profiling!
This implicit bias-

GIGI
It's not profiling-?

MELANIE
When have we encountered it ourselves?
Anjani? Gigi?

ANJANI
Could you narrow it down by like, year or something?
Which airport? It's a long list.

GIGI
White passing, so.
I don't usually get a hard time from strangers-

MELANIE
Have you done it then?

GIGI
Done what?

MELANIE
Have you racially profiled someone before?
Or multiple people?

GIGI
It's wrong to.

MELANIE
But have you?

ANJANI
Yeah, she has.
We both have.

GIGI
I just said you don't speak for me-

ANJANI
You just talked about how you let one of your members cut a girl after meeting her *one* time.

GIGI
She was uncomfortable!

ANJANI
Okay, fine, I'm *the only one in the entire world* who has judged then.
But during Rush, the number of Indian girls from day one dwindled by day four.

*The powerpoint resumes, this time directed by Anjani.
A Greek Rank profile of an Indian woman.*

ANJANI
At first I was like, "Where did all the brown girls go?"

Another Indian woman.

ANJANI

But then I was like, of course they're not coming back.
These white girls want members who are like them.

A white woman.

GIGI

Well, we're told to choose sisters who are like our sisters-

ANJANI

Meaning they don't want accents-
Unless they're British, because who doesn't love Posh Spice.
So by day five, I saw Priyanka, and I knew just by looking at her, by hearing her, that she wasn't getting in.

The powerpoint shuts off.

GIGI

So I don't think that *all* white people are bad about racism?

ANJANI

We're not talking white people, we're talking Rush, but hey, synonyms-

GIGI

Okay, well I've actually been on the other side of Rush, unlike you.
You can't even say negative things, let alone anything about race.
It's against National's rules.

ANJANI

Nationals doesn't see color?

GIGI

No.

I mean, yes, but-

MELANIE

So how do you describe someone you don't want?

GIGI

"Cute, nice, don't see her fitting in here."

ANJANI

That sounds positive?

GIGI

No, it's superficial. It's code.

If we actually want someone, she's "smart, funny, reminds me of 'so and so', has cool pants."

ANJANI

So you're only using coded language to talk about women of color, / awesome.

GIGI

That is not what I'm saying!

Melanie writes quickly in her notebook.

MELANIE

Did you ever ask why?

GIGI

It's just the rules-

I hear how it *sounds* judgey.

But being judgmental isn't the same as racial profiling-

I mean, these are two minute conversations we're having!

First impressions are important and sometimes some girls see themselves better in-

Are better at *conversation* than others!

MELANIE

How many Black girls were invited to pref night?

...This year, I mean.

GIGI

...I don't see how that is relevant?

Like, my sisters-

My *friends* I have spoken about what happened to me, for example-

Their POC friend-

And they all agreed that it was a horrible, horrible thing.

So they're not racist, and if they're not racist, then they wouldn't be part of a racist organization.

GIGI

...

They're so nice!

We have movie nights all the time.

We've watched *Roma* for fuck's sake!

MELANIE

Can you describe the lengths of the conversations?

GIGI

Well I didn't time them.

MELANIE

Do they tend to last more than thirty minutes?

GIGI

Who even has thirty minutes, right?

We're all so busy.

MELANIE

...

GIGI

I also kind of learned freshman year that it's easier if I don't push too hard when-
When it comes to these kinds of conversations.

It's one thing to post about equality on your story.

But at a mixer?

It's easier for everyone to just ease up. In case-

ANJANI

In case they don't agree?

GIGI

Some people end up not being worth the energy.

Or worth losing.

A moment between Anjani and Gigi.

MELANIE

Great stuff.

MELANIE

I hope you feel I'm calling you in, not out.

GIGI

Whatever.

MELANIE

So what I've heard:

Girls rushing are judged by two minute conversations, how they dress, their accents and other indicators of appearance?

GIGI

That's not / one hundred percent of it-

MELANIE

That's what I've written down!

ANJANI

But-

MELANIE

I think we're ready for another activity!

A song like, "Many Things" by Ngaiire plays.

Scene 8

2017, Sorority Row.

Pref Night.

Anjani and Gigi stare at their huge, laminated envelopes.

GIGI

Put your tits on, babe.

ANJANI

On three?

GIGI

Happy Pref Night.

ANJANI

One-

GIGI

Two-

Wait.

Also, important to just say now-

ANJANI

Gigi, you can't interrupt a countdown-

GIGI

No matter how great the houses are calling us back tonight-

We go the same way.

ANJANI

But-

GIGI

Seriously, Anj.

We're gonna have each other's backs.

We gotta be in the same house.

Let's ride-

Before they get to three, they tear open their envelopes.

They both breathe in relief.

GIGI
Fuck yes-
Wait, are you happy?

ANJANI
I'm-

GIGI
Thank god-
I'm going to Theta, Zeta and Gamma!

ANJANI
Theta and Gamma are on my list too!

GIGI
YES AH!
For a second I was worried I said all that but then you didn't have the same list-
Wait, what's your third house?

ANJANI
Alpha!

GIGI
Oh no-
You know what? Don't stress about it-
I'll just focus on Theta and Gamma tonight, and after we can figure out how we'll
pref and-

ANJANI
But I liked Alpha.
A lot.

GIGI
What.

ANJANI
I really liked the girls.
I felt really good about myself there.

GIGI
Because they're Top Tier?

ANJANI
No, because-

GIGI
Because frats hook up with them?

ANJANI
Gigi, I-

GIGI
Because the girls are tall blondes and vegan "for the planet"?
They're cardboard-

ANJANI
They laughed at my jokes-

GIGI
Bullshit-

ANJANI
And they didn't police literally every word out of my mouth.
Which is nice, since I have to fix half of what I say around you.

GIGI
So sorry I keep you to higher standards?
But I told you we were in this together-

ANJANI
And I didn't ask you to drop for me-
And that thing with the Alpha girl?
That didn't happen to *me*, and even if it did-

Gigi's knits her eyebrows together.

GIGI
Well I'm not lying / about it?

ANJANI

Of course not, never-
But they just can't *all* be racist.
Not everyone is coming for you!

GIGI

So you are saying I'm lying.
...What the fuck happened to the basics of friendship?

ANJANI

We're still friends, I / just don't-

GIGI

Are we?

ANJANI

Dammit Gigi, you're not even-

GIGI

Not even what.

ANJANI

You *present* white, okay?

GIGI

...

ANJANI

What happened to "constructive conversation"?

GIGI

So because you're darker, you decide what's fucked up and what's just toeing the line?

ANJANI

I didn't mean it like that-

GIGI

Go wherever you want.

GIGI

But assimilating as hard as you can to be in Alpha?
It's not going to make you white.

A song like, "Disparate Youth" by Santigold plays.

Scene 9

2020, The Psychology Department.

Melanie has projected notes from academic journals on the walls.

The terms and definitions too small to make out.

MELANIE

So for this activity, we are going to-

Gigi's phone rings.

The ringtone is embarrassing. Maybe "NO" by Meghan Trainor.

GIGI

Sorry, it's PHA, I'll be right back-

MELANIE

Don't-!

GIGI

What?

MELANIE

Don't go through that door!

GIGI

Why?

MELANIE

It's an adjoining room-

Because this is a shared space!

GIGI

Okay?

I can call outside-?

MELANIE

Just-

Just beeline to the exit.

Don't wander in the hallway.

Gigi exits.

MELANIE

Guess we're taking a little break!

Anjani takes out her phone and scrolls.

Melanie peaks out the door, making sure Gigi directly goes outside.

Melanie comes back into the room, and cups her face in both her hands. She breathes in and out.

Shift focus to Gigi, on the phone in the hallway.

GIGI

I can't talk right now-

What?

No, someone else was supposed to check out the venue-

It is not my job to plan PHA formal, that's the social chair's job-

What?

No, no it is an important event and it should be treated that way.

Well, because it's the only fucking event we're allowed to host without fraternity help.

Because it's important to have one event a year where we don't have to worry about rape patrol! This is so typical-

Sorry.

I'm sorry, I should have given you a trigger warning. Sorry.

Sorry.

I'm-

Hello?

Gigi knits her eyebrows. She dials a new number.

GIGI

Are you in the house right now?

Can you go into the chapter room and see if any officers are in there? I need someone to-

What?

Sorry, I didn't know you were hungover. Sorry.

I'm-

Hello?

Gigi grunts in frustration.

She notices someone watching her.

GIGI
Can I help you?

*Gigi's phone rings.
She immediately relaxes upon seeing the caller ID.*

GIGI
Ohmigod, Kali! Can you talk?
I need a friend-

*Shift focus back to Anjani and Melanie in the study room.
Melanie is still cupping her face.*

ANJANI
You good?

MELANIE
Of course!

ANJANI
Just...you're breathing into your hands.

Melanie removes her hands from her face.

ANJANI
You didn't used to do that.

MELANIE
I'm not always talking about race like my academic career depends on it.

ANJANI
Why trauma?
Multiculti psychology.
You hated being Diversity Chair for Alpha.

MELANIE
I hated being *useless*.
Planning panels that no one showed up to-

MELANIE

Begging Nationals to let us choose a single nonwhite philanthropy org-
Advocating for First Gen girls during rush.

But hearing, "Sorry Mel. They're weird, Mel. We're chill, remember, Mel?"

The position is for optics.

I couldn't enforce anything.

Fix anything.

ANJANI

But you stayed in it.

Unless you deactivated? You didn't really answer before.

MELANIE

I was close to graduating, it would have been a hassle to quit.

ANJANI

So you stayed then.

MELANIE

...Sorry we didn't finish talking about Rush.

You brought up some really great points.

ANJANI

Sure.

Melanie opens her notebook.

She stares at it. She does not make eye contact with Anjani.

MELANIE

Are you disappointed in me?

ANJANI

Does it matter?

MELANIE

They called my home phone. When I tried to deactivate-

Someone from Nationals.

They asked my mom-

My white mother, aka, former Alpha Philanthropy Chair Class of '84, if she was proud of raising a quitter.

MELANIE

If she had done her job right, raising a daughter who turns their back on women.
Was she okay with how I turned out?
A quitter?

ANJANI

...

MELANIE

Someone was going to end up disappointed in me.
So I thought, "I'll change it."
I see that part of myself in Gigi.

ANJANI

She's the first POC president ever.
I read about it on the PHA instagram.
I know it's not the biggest thing, but it's something.
Gigi says she did nothing as PHA president, but she did that.

MELANIE

Existing in the room doesn't change the walls.
Doesn't fix the party themes - the "ethnic" ones.
The frats that call you the House Brown Girl.
Juniors that can't hold their blue punch and call you mocha queen.
That twerk on you.

ANJANI

They wanna be debutantes-

MELANIE

But feel like a homegirl.

ANJANI

I really missed her anyway. Gigi.

MELANIE

...Do you think about that a lot?

ANJANI

Sure, I guess.

Melanie takes out her notebook.

MELANIE

Would you say that's something that has affected you long term?

ANJANI

Maybe?

MELANIE

Can I write down that you said-?

Gigi enters.

GIGI

Sorry, there was a crisis with the, um-

Gigi reads the room.

GIGI

What are we talking about?

A song like, "Bodak Yellow" by Cardi B plays.

Scene 10

2017, Sorority Row.

A banner descends.

It reads: "ALPHA BID NIGHT 2017 - WELCOME BITCHES"

MELANIE

Welcome to Alpha Alpha Alpha, sis!

Anjani and Melanie hug.

ANJANI

I *told* Gigi you weren't Kappa-

Wait, do you know where she ended up?

MELANIE

I think she's in Gamma?

ANJANI

Yeah, probably.

Good for her.

MELANIE

Are you guys not talking or-

ANJANI

I don't know.

It's a little weird with us right now-

MELANIE

I get it.

Rush can tear friendships apart.

ANJANI

It was maybe some other stuff too?

I don't know though-

MELANIE

Well, tonight is for celebrating.

You earned it!

ANJANI

Will you stick by me? I don't / know anyone-

MELANIE

Hey!

You haven't gotten a penis hat yet! It's tradition for this chapter, because we're feminists, so / you better find yourself one-

ANJANI

What?

MELANIE

My advice? Go for an uncircumcised top.
Looks better in pictures-

ANJANI

That won't go on Facebook or anything right?
My Nani / would lose it-

*From offstage somewhere, someone calls, "My fucking queen!
Pop the fuck off, bitch!"*

MELANIE

Okay I'm heading out!
Just wanted to stop by and say hi-

ANJANI

You just got here!

MELANIE

Honestly, I'm a Recruitment Counselor every year so I don't have to do Rush Week from the inside.
It's gross.

ANJANI

...You don't love Alpha?

MELANIE

It's not Alpha, it's the system-

ANJANI
That Alpha follows?

MELANIE
Yes, but once you get past that-
And the ceremonies-
And the coded language during chapter-
And the white robes we have to wear because we're "virgins"-
And the history, its roots, the alumni that come back for Founder's Day-
The ones that touch your hair.
Then, you'll figure out how to navigate it!
But the friendship lasts a lifetime!

ANJANI
But-

*From offstage somewhere, someone calls, "Where the fuck is
Melanie at?"*

MELANIE
Welcome to the sisterhood!
You get out what you put in.

*The banner falls, and sits crumpled.
A song like, "Phone" by Lizzo plays.*

Scene I I

2020, *The Psychology Department.*

MELANIE

Is everyone's phone off? I'd love to finally get to this next activity-

*Melanie turns on the powerpoint.
It projects a Radial Gradient.*

MELANIE

Here you can see one color at the edge and another at the center. This middle area is all determined by proximity to the dominant color, to whiteness.

In art theory, this is referred to as-

GIGI

It's a Radial Gradient.

What, I took Intro to Painting. I know what's up.

ANJANI

Mel's been out-researched-

GIGI

Is her face twitching? / Can you tell-

ANJANI

/ Definitely-

MELANIE

Okay, sure, maybe it is an art term, but-

GIGI

But I still can't paint.

ANJANI

Sorry, Mel. It didn't help Gigi paint, so it can't solve hate.

MELANIE

Well, it's the whole thing my thesis depends on, okay?

In art theory, this is a Radial Gradient.

MELANIE

In multicultural psychology:
Colorism politics in America.

Melanie clicks to the next slide.

It is a series of charts and figures. It makes little sense to the viewer.

MELANIE

These focus groups across the country tell us that most Americans have three categories when it comes to the census: White, Black, and Other.

GIGI

Ow-

MELANIE

People categorize people based on presentation. Skin tones are-

A spectrum of race, of presentation, experience.

Let's try it for ourselves!

Here-

Melanie holds out a bowl.

Gigi and Anjani each take out a few pieces of folded paper.

This is Melanie's Christmas.

MELANIE

Open them!

ANJANI

Zendaya?

Gina Rodriguez-

GIGI

I have Lucy Liu!

MELANIE

Where would you place them!

ANJANI

Like, by *color*?

MELANIE
Yes!

ANJANI
That seems offensive?

GIGI
And upsetting.

MELANIE
Why!

ANJANI
Because color and culture aren't the same?

GIGI
Because one color isn't the same for a whole race?

MELANIE
Writing that down!

GIGI
Because race is a construct to begin with?

ANJANI
Why is Ariana Grande in here?
She's white.

GIGI
No she's not.

ANJANI
Yes, she is.

Anjani pins the Ariana headshot to the projected Radial Gradient somewhere near the white area.

GIGI
She's Latinx / right?

ANJANI

She's *Italian*.

She was literally in *Thirteen*.

GIGI

Okay, but on *Victorious*-

And I mean, her album covers are-

She sings in Spanish sometimes-

ANJANI

Yeah, and she inflated her lips for *7 Rings*-

But she shows up pale and blonde for *Time* and *Vogue*.

MELANIE

And of course, there is her blaccent-

ANJANI

Why would you put her in if you knew she's white?

MELANIE

That's why Kim K is in here too! Someone should have her-

GIGI

Kim's white.

MELANIE

Technically, she is half Armenian-

GIGI

She was white until 2008 when she figured out how to ethnically edit-

MELANIE

(Culturally appropriate-)

GIGI

Don't worry, even my sister Kali was confused, all like-

"This is representation. She's ours!"

And I was like, "No Kali, she is not."

MELANIE

And yet we do this with girls during Rush. You just did it, just now!
 We are bred by systems to think with *racialized bias*, so that we don't question power.
 And we forget that colorism is racism.
 We take mental photos and we slot based on guesses.
 It's enraging!

Gigi's knits her eyebrows together.

GIGI

It has it's moments though-

MELANIE

When there is no known definite right and no definite wrong, no education-
 No majority-

GIGI

Sometimes it was really fun-

MELANIE

A predominantly white institution-

GIGI

The parties and the automatic friends-

MELANIE

That maintains social power, status for a few-

GIGI

Friends who don't leave you.

MELANIE

While excluding the rest. Benefitting off exclusivity.

Gigi cups her face in her hands.

GIGI

But-
 It's a-

GIGI
I'm just-

MELANIE
Complicit.

*Gigi keeps her hands off her face.
She starts to say something, stops.
Tries to come up with something, anything to say, but fails.
She sits in this discomfort.*

ANJANI
You can quit.
I quit.

GIGI
We're about to graduate-

ANJANI
It's the principle of the thing.

GIGI
They wouldn't stay friends with me.

ANJANI
If they really are all that, they'll stick. Even if you're no longer *paying* them to.
If they don't, maybe-

GIGI
Maybe they're not my friends?

ANJANI
Maybe.

A song like, "Say So" by Doja Cat plays.

Scene 12

*2017, Gigi and Anjani's dorm, two weeks after Rush.
Gigi and Anjani type on their laptops, silently.*

GIGI

...

ANJANI

...

GIGI

Huh?

ANJANI

What?

GIGI

I thought you said something.

ANJANI

I didn't.

GIGI

Oh.

ANJANI

...

So how long are we ignoring each other?

GIGI

I'm not ignoring you.

ANJANI

You're avoiding me, at the very least.

GIGI

This is the first time *you're* in our room before midnight in like, two weeks.

ANJANI

I've been out.

GIGI
At Alpha stuff?

ANJANI
Not for long.

Gigi slams her laptop shut.

GIGI
Wait, are you dropping!?

ANJANI
Yes.

GIGI
ANJ!

ANJANI
We're so weird right now, / I wanted to tell you-

Gigi leaps up and hugs Anjani. She hugs her back.

GIGI
AHHH! That's amazing!
Oh my god, I missed you!

ANJANI
I'm so sorry it took me this long to realize what you were saying.
I'm glad we're not gonna be Greek Life girls.

Gigi breaks away.

GIGI
What?

ANJANI
I mean, I figured it out, Greek Life sucks-

GIGI
No, *Alpha* sucks. It's the bad egg in the bunch.

GIGI
Gamma is different.

ANJANI
There isn't that much different between Alpha and Gamma, Gi.

Gigi takes a step back. She knits her eyebrows together.

GIGI
I disagree.

ANJANI
Look, I talked to Mel and-

GIGI
And she's in Alpha-

ANJANI
And she hates Greek Life.
She didn't say it explicitly, but like, she told me enough of the gross stuff they keep hush-hush and like-
I don't want to be part of that.

GIGI
You just agree with whatever she says because you like her so much.
Maybe these spaces were originally made for white girls, but I can make it work for me.

ANJANI
You're such a hypocrite Gigi.

GIGI
No, I just clock my privilege.
I got in, and I can pay for it.
So I know exactly what I should be doing:
I'm supposed to change it.
So I'm gonna pledge and get some power as like, Diversity Chair or something.
And then I'm gonna dismantle and burn what needs to go from the inside.

ANJANI

...

Anjani goes back to her laptop.

GIGI

What, you got nothing to say again?

ANJANI

I'm just confused.

I'm the one who needs some time now, I think.

A song like, "Blossom Dearie" by Ravyn Lenae plays.

Scene 13

2020, The Psychology Department.

MELANIE

So I'm sensing tension.
Let's pair up and talk about that?

GIGI

There's only two of us-

Melanie steps out.

Anjani and Gigi acknowledge each other.

ANJANI

I / um-
What were you gonna-
No, I was going to say that this-

GIGI

Can we-
Sorry, never-
What?

ANJANI

You go.

GIGI

What does she want us to say?

ANJANI

Probably talk more about trauma. / Eek.

GIGI

Eek.

Anjani smirks, Gigi does too.

GIGI

Just how broken we are-

ANJANI
Just so broken and so weak-

GIGI
How do we get through the days!?

ANJANI
Edibles?

*Gigi guffaws.
It is a sudden, genuine sound that cracks Anjani up.
They are laughing together.
Gigi looks at Anjani as if to say, "Fuck. I've missed you."*

GIGI
Gammas have been sending texts, their condolences, or like, "good vibes."
But no one wants to hang out right now?
Like, maybe I'll bring up race, or something-

ANJANI
I get it-

GIGI
No, you don't.
I have *always* felt proud of who I am, like, ethnically-
Until this thing happened.

ANJANI
Okay, well I'm proud of who I am-
I just think there other things distinct about me-
Besides where my grandparents are from.

GIGI
Until I became friends with you, I never needed to think about that.
Or question my PC sisters.

ANJANI
Well that's dumb.

GIGI
Excuse me?

ANJANI
I mean, you were always calling me out on *my* shit.

GIGI
Maybe-

ANJANI
You were.
Thank you, by the way.

GIGI
Why thank / me?

ANJANI
Because how else do I learn. Unlearn?

GIGI
...

ANJANI
So thanks-
...Even though you didn't take criticism the same way.
To the point where it made being friends with you hard.
So maybe-
When you told me about Alpha, about Kappa, when you asked me to believe you, I
wanted proof.
But I should have taken you at your word.

GIGI
Um, that's great, but like-
Remember when you moved out?
You ignored me all of winter, and when we came back from spring break, you were
gone.
And do you know how messy you were?

ANJANI
You're welcome for the cleaner dingle then-

GIGI

It tore me up how clean it was when you were gone.
 It sucked looking at your side of the room like no one ever lived there.
 So I pledged, because, you know, I didn't want to start over in finding friends for
 the third time freshman year.
 Stupid choice, because now I'm like-
 How much damage have I caused by being part of it?

ANJANI

If it wasn't Greek Life, it would've been a different club.
 Student Government? Theatre?
 It's all the same shit.

GIGI

We could transfer?

ANJANI

Go where? Where is it different?

GIGI

The homeland?

ANJANI

America is my homeland.

GIGI

...You're right.
 Sorry.

ANJANI

I'm sorry too.

*A moment in which the women figure out how to be sorry
 and be together.*

GIGI

Really out here trying to figure out how to operate.

*Gigi coolly leans over to Anjani.
 Anjani leans back.*

*They lean against each other, heads connected.
They breathe together.
And again.
They separate.*

GIGI
But can we talk about hypocritical Melanie is being?

ANJANI
Melanie is not the icon she used to be.

GIGI
Do we leave?

ANJANI
I mean, I stayed hoping we might like, get dinner after this?

GIGI
Like a date?

ANJANI
I like Pizza Shack.

GIGI
Bet.
But then you have to tell her we're going.

*Anjani groans, then exits.
Gigi takes out her phone and dials a number.*

GIGI
Kali, it's me. I know we just talked an hour ago, but I'm feeling better now, I'm feeling-
Clearer.
I've been thinking about Gamma stuff, and-
Whatever you think is best, I'll do, but-

*Gigi goes to cup her face in her hands, but stops.
She breathes deeply.*

GIGI

I think if the PHA president quits maybe-

And I won't feel so-

I'm deactivating.

Love you.

A song like "Holy" by Jamila Woods plays.

Scene 14

2017, Sorority Row.

The Alpha Alpha Alpha house.

MELANIE

I've been studying for this midterm forever, I'm losing it-
I'd give you snacks, but you can't eat in the living room on a chapter day.
A Nationals Rep could come over at any time-

ANJANI

Seems like a crazy rule?

MELANIE

Well if we didn't have rules, we'd be a fraternity.

ANJANI

I've been trying to find you for a few days. Since Bid Night.
You kind of ran away from me-

MELANIE

Sorry, just-
My head is all over the place today.
Can we not?

ANJANI

...

I just wanted to let you know I'm quitting.
Or, dropping-
Whatever it's called at this stage, before official pledging-

MELANIE

You can't do that.

ANJANI

I really feel like I should, though-

MELANIE

No no no no no I vouched for you.
I got you in here.
You're my girl.

ANJANI

You were my RC, you weren't in Rush-

MELANIE

Yeah, but I still text the Head of Recruitment a list of who I want.

ANJANI

That's not fair-

MELANIE

Oh come on, so many girls from Westchester get in because they know people from their high schools.

They post up letters on our fourth floor bathroom stall.

Recommendations for Jessica, Rebecca, Olivia-

"Please can she be in our chapter? This bitch is so cool and nice and sweet and funny and white and the same as me and-"

And you're *my* rec.

One for *my* team.

You were gonna be my little!

ANJANI

We can still be friends-?

MELANIE

Who knows about this?

ANJANI

I emailed the Standards Board today.

I told them that I didn't feel comfortable here-

MELANIE

Then you can't even be in the house right now.

ANJANI

What?

MELANIE

If you're quitting, you-

you're-

...You're banned.

Melanie recalls the rules.

MELANIE

Those are the rules.

Please don't get me in trouble.

Melanie goes back to her laptop.

ANJANI

I'll leave you to your work then.

Scene 15

2020, The Psychology Department.

As Melanie steps outside into the hallway, grey glass descends, covering where Anjani and Gigi remain.

The house lights come up.

Melanie faces them, on the outside looking in.

She watches through the glass as Anjani and Gigi make peace.

She jots notes.

Suddenly, she jolts, noticing she too is being watched.

She turns and notices someone.

MELANIE

Professor Schwartz-

Professor Collins, Professor Henriquez.

Have you *all* been observing? Or, “peeping”, if that holds more sex appeal for you, Professor Saunders.

I was skeptical of the two-way glass at first-

But I suppose it paid off-

You watching me watching them.

Ends really do justify means in our field, don't they?

And...I'd love your thoughts, Professor Saunders, before the official dissertation defense?

I'd appreciate them.

Support.

I would appreciate being supported by my advisors, my school.

I would appreciate being told I was doing a worthwhile job rather than chasing a worthwhile cause.

I would appreciate if the department-

If *you*, would actively engage rather than watch.

If you'd just participate-

Anjani steps into the hallway-

ANJANI

Mel?

I think Gigi and I are heading out-

Anjani notices the audience.

ANJANI
Who are they?

MELANIE
These are my / advisors-

ANJANI
Have they been watching us?
The whole time?

*Anjani stares at Melanie.
Melanie avoids Anjani's eye contact.*

MELANIE
Two-way / glass is standard-

ANJANI
What the / fuck!?

MELANIE
Can you just-
Can you go back in please, / just-
Stop looking for a second, please-

ANJANI
Melanie-
What is going on?
What / the hell is this-

MELANIE
Just-

ANJANI
Gigi!

Anjani rushes back into the room.

MELANIE
I can explain-

Melanie rushes in after her.

ANJANI

Did you know we're being watched?
That shit is two-way glass-
Just / ask Melanie-

GIGI

What the / fuck-

MELANIE

If you guys just give me a second to-

Melanie cups her face in both hands and breathes in deeply.

GIGI

They heard *everything*?

*Melanie takes her hands off of her face, smooths her hair down, smooths the sides of her hips.
She clasps her hands in front of her, almost in defense.*

MELANIE

You guys have grown so much today.
And I helped you do that, / I have-!

GIGI

Are they still watching this?

MELANIE

And you know, the impact of what I have provided for you today?
That will have a domino effect-
Now *you* can educate others / about the Radial Gradient, about racial trauma-

ANJANI

Educate or exploit?

GIGI

I said really personal information-

MELANIE

Which I truly, deeply appreciate-!

GIGI

I didn't want strangers to know.

MELANIE

The study clearly aims to explain the effects of structural racism built into predominantly white spaces-

I can't prove that without your personal / experiences-

ANJANI

Write about how *you* fucked up then.

This is just Alpha all over / again-

MELANIE

I am trying to do something *about* Alpha!

I've learned from my experiences-

This is redemption-

ANJANI

(Whose side are you on.)

GIGI

Who are you even doing this for?

This "study" or whatever-

Who reads this even?

MELANIE

My advisors.

The department-

GIGI

That's where the grant money is from.

Who is the work *for*?

MELANIE

For-

For you-

For young women of color everywhere-

MELANIE

Think of how much our *University* needs to change-

GIGI

You *support* the University!

MELANIE

Sacrificing privacy is the only way to-
This study gives a voice to the voiceless-

ANJANI

But we're not voiceless!

MELANIE

Look, I'm not the enemy!
I *acknowledge* my shortcomings, okay!
But I would not have gotten into this grad program without The Greek Life Network.
Not without a sister of a sister who made a call-
I mean do you know the history of this country?
I don't have old money, country clubs-
Unlike you guys, I actually know what FAFSA is.
So maybe it sucked being a little complicit for a little while, but Alpha has opened some doors postgrad-
And maybe I delayed some information, but it's for the research!
The greater good! Just until I get published-
So I can make spaces better for others in the long run-
And then everyone wins!
I'm making all these places work, playing all these systems, playing *nice*, so that I can *change* systems!

ANJANI

You don't want to change them.
You benefit now.

GIGI

This is not a complicated grey area, Mel-
You used us for a show.

MELANIE

... You both signed the waivers.
It's technically, all very ethical.

GIGI

Where are they? Don't use my shit-

ANJANI

And I want this-

*Anjani takes Melanie's notebook.
Melanie lunges for it.*

MELANIE

You can't-
That's my thesis-

Anjani dares Melanie to take it.

ANJANI

No, it's our actual, everyday lives.

*Realizing she is still being watched by an audience, Melanie
stiffens.
Anjani gives the notebook to Gigi.*

MELANIE

Gigi-

Gigi pours a plastic bottle of water on the notebook.

GIGI

I hope you find your audience, Mel.

A song like "Formation" by Beyoncé plays.

Scene 16

2017, Sorority Row.

The research study falls away.

Melanie cups her face in her hands and breathes.

In, and out.

She takes off her blazer, puts on her RC sweatshirt.

She clings to her clipboard.

MELANIE

Group 24! Last call!

Gigi and Anjani tumble over each other to get to Melanie.

They look younger, dressed in Rush shirts and “nude” heels.

GIGI

Hi! I'm Gigi, this is / Anjani-

ANJANI

I'm Anjani-

MELANIE

You guys are late.

GIGI

Sorry, I thought we were meeting later / and then-

ANJANI

She's covering for me, I was the one who got the time wrong-

MELANIE

Ah, best friends-

Cute.

GIGI

We're roommates.

ANJANI

...And best friends?

GIGI

Yeah, obviously / you nut-

MELANIE

Okay, well, the rest of our group just got dismissed but-
I'm your RC!

Nice to / meet you guys!

GIGI

An RC is a Recruitment Counselor-

ANJANI

Got it.

MELANIE

Basically, I'm here to be like an older sister-
Before you meet your sisters.

This can be a crazy process, but keep in mind, we're not like everywhere else,
thank god.

ANJANI

How, what-

GIGI

People are actually liberal.
Right?

MELANIE

Exactly.

It's different here.

You can trust our Rush system.

Still, don't be afraid to confide in me, even after this whole thing.

*Projected on the walls are GreekRank profiles, ratings
captioned below.*

They slide across faster and faster.

Gigi and Anjani share a moment.

Melanie notices, compensates.

MELANIE

Especially if something goes wrong-
 Or makes you uncomfortable-
 No need to sit in it!
 Please ask questions!
 We can fix it.
 I can explain it!
 And so tell me-
 Because there's no problem too small to bother with, and-
 You are not projecting!

*An overlapped slideshow of future University emails stating solidarity, a slideshow of GreekRank headshots, and video of sorority houses clapping during welcome week.
 Anjani and Gigi start backing away.
 They exit.
 Melanie, alone, as the projections play.
 She cups her face in her hands and breathes deeply.
 She snaps back into presentation mode.*

MELANIE

You can trust me!
 I mean, I trust the people in charge.
 ...
 I'm here for you!
 ...
 I'm here for-
 ...
 For-

*Blackout.
 Then, the clapping cuts out.
 A song like, "Gonna Love Me" by Teyana Taylor.
 End of play.*