THREE IMAGINARY CONVERSATIONS WITH YOU
Heather Demetrios
I'm breaking up with you today.

After two years, four months, three weeks, five days, and eight hours of being Gavin Davis's Girlfriend I am breaking up with you.

You won't see it coming. Your little high school girlfriend who never says no to you, the one who blows off her friends for your college keggers, the one who just sits there when you tell her she's a drag and that dating a girl in high school fucking sucks—that girl is Breaking Up With You.

I'm breaking up with you even though Christmas is next week and I already bought you a present it's too late to return.

I'm breaking up with you even though the thought of breaking up with you hurts.

This is how it will go down:

First we'll go to The Nutcracker because your mom bought us tickets as a Christmas present and I'll decide it'd be shitty not to go because she'll feel like I'm rejecting her and I only want to reject you. This will be a terrible decision, but I'll make it anyway.
because when we end, your parents—who see me as a daughter who’s going to be in their family forever—will be collateral damage. I want them to hurt as little as possible. Obviously what I plan to do after the show is even more shitty, but at least your mom won’t feel like she wasted the money. I just know that if I don’t do this before Christmas, I never will. Because if I wait, you’ll get me a sweet gift like you did last year (Who buys a first edition of a girl’s favorite childhood book? You.)—and I won’t be able to go through with it.

I have to do this.

I’ve pictured it a thousand times, a thousand different ways. This is one of them.

First: When you come to pick me up, I’ll wonder if I should wait just a few more days because of how your eyes light up when you see me in my dress. I’ll think about how in a few hours those eyes are going to be red-rimmed and pleading. (Note to self: wear something terrible.) And, of course, you’ll be crazy hot, wearing a tie or something and the thought of you dressing up for another girl after we break up will make me insanely jealous, which is so stupid, but I won’t be able to help it. Then I’ll start psychoanalyzing what that means, like, if I feel jealous, then doesn’t that prove that, deep down, I want to stay together? Meanwhile, I’ll feel even more uncertain as I watch you play with my little brother, who you genuinely adore and constantly compare to the kid in Jerry Maguire. You’ll call him little dude, which he loves. I’ll see Sam kiss you on the cheek before we leave for the theater and you’ll kiss him right back and it’ll be the sweetest goddamn thing I’ve ever seen. Fuck you for that.
On the way to the theater, we’ll get into a little argument and I’ll feel vindicated. You’re upset that my parents want me home by eleven. You’ll sigh and shake your head, like you’re the most put-upon boyfriend in the universe. “You’re lucky I love you so much.” Compliment and criticism rolled into one, as usual. But the thing is: I’ll believe you. Because I know my parents are super strict and I’m a little bit of a prude. And because I still can’t shake the awe that when we were in high school together, you chose me over girls who were so much prettier, so much more. I don’t understand why you still choose me over college girls who are independent and flirty and fun. So, yeah, maybe I’m lucky. I’ll still want to break up, though.

In the theater parking lot or going up the fancy staircase inside, I’ll think about that day at the park, when we were on the swings and you said, Jessa, you have no idea how hard it is to love you. But I can’t stop. I won’t stop. You expanded on this. You went on and on about how hard I am to love with my negativity and my strict parents and my crazy ideas about chastity. You call me Eeyore, as in the depressive donkey from Winnie-the-Pooh, and not always affectionately. You say I’m a wet blanket and a tease and you don’t care how much I get punished when I come home after curfew. You don’t care what price I have to pay for us to be together. This is my ammunition and I have stored it carefully inside me: proof we are bad together.

After the show (you’ll be a perfect gentleman, buying me the expensive souvenir program and kissing my neck), we’ll be sitting in your mom’s car outside McDonald’s, our typical late-night-snack place. You’ll have coffee, black. I’ll have the McFlurry I
don’t want (You’ll buy it for me even when I say not to because you hate eating or drinking or doing anything alone. You’ll tell me I love McFlurries and that will be that).

“Hey, I know it’s early, but . . .” You’ll reach into your pocket and I’ll shrink away. (Crap! I thought I was doing this early enough!) You’ll hand me a long, thin velvet box. A jewelry box. I won’t want to know what’s inside, so I’ll decide not to open it. This time, I won’t let you trick me into staying together.

I’ll shake my head. You’ll think I’m being coy and you’ll smile your sweet, sexy smile—not the cruel one—and you’ll push it closer. (Pushing—you’re so good at that, aren’t you?) I’ll hug the door of the car, keep my hands behind me. Your smile will slide off your face and God, I won’t be able to do this. Because I’ll see your heart breaking, like you already know what’s going to happen.

“What’s up?” you’ll ask. Your voice shakes a little, but you’ll try to keep it casual.

For a minute, I won’t be able to answer because you are so familiar to me and I’ll start thinking (like I always do) about what it would be like not to have this: you, across from me, having our little traditions like coffee and McFlurries. I’ll start wondering if this is the last time I’ll ever sit in this car and my resolve will start to waver, just a little. I’ll watch you for a minute because even then, preparing to break up with you, I can’t stop looking. I can’t stop wanting you.

Your hair is blond and the fluorescent parking lot lights make it gleam. I used to call you Prince Charming, before, when you were the popular senior captain of the water polo team, the guitar-playing god who noticed mousy little me and said I’m taking you
out tonight. I’m only now realizing that wasn’t a question. Technically, you never asked me out. You didn’t give me the option of saying no.

At some point between leaving the theater and arriving at McDonald’s you’ll have grown tired of the tie and dress shirt and changed into the shirt I bought you two years ago, right after we got together. Just a stupid Hollister shirt, but you love it and sometimes ask me to sleep in it so it’ll smell like me. It’s faded now and has a hole near the shoulder and isn’t that us, I’ll want to say right then, Isn’t that us?

I’ll take a deep breath. “We have to break up.”

You’ll go still. Utterly, completely still.

You’ll swallow. Look at the little box in your hand. A truck full of guys will rev past us and I’ll jump. They’ll swing into the drive-through and order half the menu while we sit there, staring at each other. You’ll set my Christmas present on the dashboard.

“I’ll kill myself if you break up with me.”

You’ve never said this before, but when I imagine breaking up with you, I hear this. Because you said it to someone else, didn’t you? And when she had the courage to do what I’m about to do . . . you did try to kill yourself. And, silly me, at the time I thought that was beautifully tragic. I saw you as the spurned lover, the ultimate romantic. God, what was I thinking? You were insane. I was reading too much Byron at the time, that must have been what it was.

I’ll sit there in the passenger seat of your mom’s sensible, slightly expensive car, the one with the seats that warm our asses, and my mind will freeze, like brain freeze only worse.
Kill.
Myself.

And then I’ll get angry. Just imagining you doing this and putting your hypothetical suicide on me—it makes me so angry. Angry is good. I’ll need to stay angry. That’s how your ex did it and that’s how I’ll do it. I’ll think about how you’re saying this in a McDonald’s parking lot. In a McDonald’s parking lot. And I’ll think: Aren’t you supposed to declare the intent to end your life in an abandoned alley or on a windswept moor—something just a little bit poetic?

Then I’ll be scared. Because . . . what if you mean it?

“No you won’t.” I’ll whisper those words, as if saying them more quietly will calm the sharp-beaked thing inside you.

You’ll take the keys out of the ignition and grip them in your palm and I am the keys, I am the one being held so tightly in your white-knuckled fist.

“Yes. I will.” This will be said slowly, as if you were talking to a child, as if me still being in high school and you being in college automatically makes you the mature one. This is your Calm Boyfriend voice. I hate it now and I’ll hate it then, too.

“I’ve thought about it before,” you’ll say. “I have a plan.” You’ll look at me. “You know I’ll go through with it.”

“Jesus, Gavin.”

“Do you want to know how I’ll do it?”

“No.” Then I’ll explode. “What the fuck is wrong with you? That’s sick.”

“Do you think I like being like this?” You’ll hit the steering wheel with your fist, hard. “It’s your fault, for saying shit like that.”
“I meant it. I don’t want to be with you anymore.” I’ll start shaking and I won’t be able to stop because I’ll feel it slipping— me, my resolve, all of it.

“Then I mean it, too. Leave me, fine. I just hope you’ll go to my funeral.”

“What the fuck, Gavin?”

And I’ll hear my best friend’s voice, as though she’s right in the car with us: Stop letting him manipulate you, Jessa. He knows exactly what to say to keep you with him. He always does.

It’ll be quiet in the car for a long time and my mind will start to wander, to try to get away. In these almost-break-up moments it does that. I’ll think about weird stuff like how I need to dust my bedroom or rework the thesis for a paper. But this night, I’ll think of Adam. I know because I haven’t been able to stop thinking about him for the past two weeks, since the cast party for the school play. You didn’t want me to go. You wouldn’t come because it was a “stupid high school party,” but I finally put my foot down. It’s my senior year and I want to enjoy it. I’m tired of ditching my friends because they’re too lame for you.

So while you sit there imagining your suicide, I’ll replay the cast party. It has become my happy place.

Adam is just my friend. I don’t know if I like him as anything more than that, but when I was hanging out with him at the cast party, I realized that I might be feeling something for someone who isn’t you. Nothing serious, just a tiny revelation that there are other guys in the world. I found myself wondering what it would be like to kiss him. Or even hold his hand. I didn’t. I just imagined it.

Even though it was cold as hell, we sat by the edge of the pool
at Jason Scheffer’s house and talked all night and laughed so hard our stomachs hurt. For the first time in so long, I wasn’t ashamed to be in high school. To be a kid. I told him about my necklaces, about how each one I make means something, has a story. I told him about how I collect the beads, sometimes for months or even years, and I wait until I can put the story of the necklace together. And the next day, he gave me a bead. Sea green with white swirls. He’d found it in the greenroom, when he was helping pack away costumes. It was such a small thing—literally, figuratively—but it felt huge. It was a gift from another guy and I kept it. I kept it. This scared the shit out of me, contemplating me with Adam or even just me without us. Our lives, after two years together, have become so entwined that the thought of unraveling you from me is almost as bad as the thought of never kissing someone else.

But back to the McDonald’s parking lot. I need to picture all of this before you pick me up looking hot in your suit and kissing my little brother’s cheek. I need to imagine the worst-case scenario because then when it happens, it’ll be old news and you won’t be able to shock me into staying together. So, you’ll say you’re going to kill yourself. I’ll think about how I love you and how I don’t want you to die. God, that’s exactly what you’ll want, isn’t it? I love you + I don’t want you to die = I don’t break up with you. But they don’t have to add up to that, they don’t. I’ll decide to be strong. I’ll think about that bead and the possibility of dating lots of guys and not being Gavin Davis’s Girlfriend, but instead . . . me. That will sound kinda nice. It will give me courage, that thought.

“Gavin.” I’ll put my hand over your fist. “I still love you. But I think we’re over.”
“You’re my life,” you’ll say.

Wait. If you tell me this . . . what will I do? Because . . . I’m your life? Not your band or your friends at school or whatever, but . . . me? You’ve never told me that before. The doubt creeps in and I hate it because it’s telling me to wait. Just one more chance, you always say. I didn’t know you felt that way . . . I can change . . . I’ll give you more space . . .

I’ll stare at you. Your eyes will be more blue than green and I’ll think that no one really knows that but me—how your eyes change color. Tonight they’ll be sad and desperate and full of love.

“We can be so good together, you know that,” you’ll say. “Once you graduate, this will all be a bad dream, I promise.”

Memories, so many. I’ll think about the time you made me soup when I was sick and how you skipped the party for the water polo championships and stayed curled up next to me, risking the flu and reading me my favorite picture books. And of course I’ll think about the first song you wrote me and how you serenaded me as I came out of math class. You even got some of the water polo team to back you up. (I still don’t know how you convinced them to do that.) And, God, our first kiss: in the rain, against a wall in an alley—even now it makes me blush.

But I’ll remember that there are words in my head, ones I’ve been practicing for months and never have the guts to say because right when I’m going to say them you do something wonderful. But I think I’ll be able to say them tonight. You can do this, I’ll tell myself.

“Gav. We aren’t happy together.” I want happy. So, so much.
“We fight. All the time. You’re always in a bad mood when I’m around.”

“Because your fucking parents never let me see you!”

“I’m seventeen!” I’ll be yelling now. There’s always a point where we start yelling and when you talk about my parents as your fucking parents, that will be the button you push that I can’t ignore. I love my fucking parents. “I have a curfew. I have class every morning at seven thirty. I can’t stay out until three a.m. like you do.”

“Okay, I’m sorry. Jessa, please—”

You’ll reach out and your fingers will touch the necklace around my neck. Because I’m feeling sentimental, I’ll be wearing the one I made the week we got together, in a total frenzy, where each bead represented a daydream about you. Your fingers skim over the beads, over those fantasies about you and guilt, guilt, guilt because I’ll think of that glass bead, which has been in my pocket since the day Adam gave it to me. How many times have I touched it over the past two weeks thinking, what if, what if?

“We have to break up,” I’ll say again. If I keep saying it, then maybe it will happen.

You’ll turn away from me and take the necklace with you. I’ll feel it go taut against my neck and then it’ll be gone, beads everywhere, flying all over the car. I’ll only know it’s an accident by the shocked look on your face.

I’ll have this thought: I’ll never be able to put it back together. The necklace, us. Never, never.

You’ll say you’re sorry about a million times and we’ll look at the beads and then, God, you’ll be crying. Sobbing, almost. Fuck. Fuck. I’ll want the anger to stay, but it’s going . . . going . . .
“You’re my soul mate, Jessa. We’re supposed to be together. Forever. That was the deal.”

Then you’ll shatter right in front of me, just like you did when your dad said I can’t do this anymore and walked out your front door with a suitcase in his hand. And I’ll have to clean you up, put you back together. I’m glue. I’m glue.

“Don’t be like him,” you’ll whisper. “Please, Jessa. I can’t watch someone else walk away.”

Ah, yes. The final nail in the coffin. This memory, this is what it always comes down to:

*A fireplace. Christmas. Pretty lights and hot cocoa, you looking down at me.*

“Don’t ever leave me,” you say.

“I won’t.”

*Candy cane kisses, snow angels, mistletoe.*

“Promise me.” Your lips, so close to mine. “I don’t want us to be like my parents. I want forever with you. Promise me, Jessa.”

“I promise.”

The memory will wash over me and your tears will cut me and I’ll decide I won’t do this to you, not after everything we’ve been through. I’ll reach up and put my arms around you.

“I love you, I love you,” I’ll whisper. “I didn’t mean it. I don’t want to break up. I don’t. I’m sorry.”

You’ll press your lips against mine and they’ll be salty with tears and I’ll breathe you in and even though my stomach will churn a little because a part of me has grown to hate the smell of your cologne, I’ll let you pull me into your lap. We’ll make out and we’ll fall into it, so easy, so natural. And I’ll tell myself I love you. I do. I do.
Your hands will cover my body like they own me. They stopped asking permission a long time ago. We’ll go further than we ever have because I’ll feel like I owe you, for putting you through this. I’ll want to throw up. I’ll want to kill myself.

“I’m glad I don’t have to die tonight,” you’ll say a few hours later, as you drop me off at home, well past curfew. You’ll smile, as though we’re in on the same sick joke and, in a way, I guess we will be.

When I get inside, I’ll put Adam’s bead at the bottom of my jewelry box.

I won’t look at it again.

2

I’m breaking up with you today.

I mean it this time.

I’m breaking up with you because when we took a “break” last month, you showed up on my doorstep every single night with a bouquet of flowers and a song you’d written about me, even though I told you I needed space.

I’m breaking up with you because instead of going to my senior prom tonight, I’m going to some stupid party your band is playing at.

I’m breaking up with you because I just found out that I got into your college and I’m scared that if I don’t break up with you, I’ll actually go there. And then you’ll get me pregnant and I’ll
have to marry you and wear the scarves your sister knits me for the rest of my life and pretend to love you even though by then I’ll hate you.

This is how it will go down:

I’ll be standing against a wall at the party, by myself. Every time you come over, someone will pull you away and you’ll give me an apologetic look and I’ll turn into Stepford girlfriend and smile and say, “Go, go, I’m fine.” I’ll be dressed a little bit slutty because you like that, you like that it makes me look older. I’ll wear too much makeup and the high heels will be killing my feet, but I’ll wear them because you begged me to. You said they turn you on.

I’ll check my cell and it’ll be late, almost curfew. I won’t want to check it too much because everyone will be posting pictures from prom and every time I see them I’ll have to force myself not to cry. I’ll think about what a mistake it was, coming to the party, and how I can never have another senior prom. The curfew thing will be stressing me out and I’ll be so tired of pretending I’m actually going to drink the beer I’m holding in my hand.

By this point, I’ll have told you I need to go five times already—five, I counted—but you’ll keep saying, “Just a few more minutes.” I’ll feel jealous of the girls who hug you when they see you and are all starry-eyed over your sexy guitar playing and I’ll wonder if I’m the biggest joke in the room. Finally you’ll grab my hand and I’ll think we might actually be leaving this time. “Guess we have to go,” you’ll say, all woe-is-me. “God, I can’t wait until you graduate.”

You are a broken record.
“You can come back,” I’ll say. “You know. After you drop me off.”

A guy will come up as we’re nearing the doors—the singer of the band that played before yours. Lead Singer smirks.

“Hey Cradle Robber.”

You’ll have the good grace to bristle. But then I’ll realize it’s not for my benefit: it’s for yours. I’ll see how you’re embarrassed for yourself, that you have to cart around a minor.

“Dude, shut the fuck up,” you’ll say.

“Just giving you a hard time, Gav.” The guy will talk like I’m not there—they all do. Like I can’t hear this conversation about me.

You’ll smile and lean in closer to him and I won’t be sure if I’m supposed to hear this—do you want me to hear this?

“The things she can do with her mouth.” You’ll shake your head, like you can’t even begin to describe how good my blow jobs are and the lead singer guy raises his hand for a congratulatory fist bump and I will burn with shame, on fire, Joan of Arc burning and you won’t see it, you won’t care and you’ll do the fist bump and I’ll hate you because I hate blow jobs and you know that, but you’ve never cared because, you say, “It’s the least you can do.” Like wanting to stay a virgin until I graduate is some kind of crime.

The guy will walk away and you’ll turn to me and you must finally see the spontaneous combustion in front of you because you’ll say, “Jessa. Don’t be such a wet blanket. Jesus.”

I’ll practically run out of there, which is pretty hard to do in my too-high heels. You’ll catch me halfway down the street and
I’ll be crying by then and you’ll hold me to you and you won’t let go.

“I’m sorry,” you’ll whisper. “I’m such a dick. I’m sorry. He just got under my skin and I’m pissed I have to take you home. I miss you.”

I’ll smell the beer on your breath and the cigarettes on your T-shirt and it’ll give me enough strength to push you away from me.

“No. I’m done.”

I’ll whip out my phone and dial my best friend. I’m calling her to pick me up—she said she’d ditch her prom date if I needed her to.

“Don’t,” you’ll say, reaching for the phone. “Let me take you home.”

“No.” My voice will be a growl and it’ll feel so good to say the one word that’s been absent from my vocabulary for so long. I’ll hold on to the phone like it’s a can of pepper spray.

“Jessa.” Your voice will break and there’s fear in it, real fear, and I’ll suddenly get why you won’t let me do this, no matter how hard I try.

“The only reason you’re staying with me,” I’ll say, savoring each word, “is because you don’t want to be alone. You’re afraid to be alone.”

“That’s not true.”

But I can finally admit it to myself. I hope it goes down like this tonight because I want to say these words to you so bad. They’re crawling up my throat. I want to vomit them all over you. I want you to smell like them for days afterward.

“We’re not soul mates,” I’ll say. “I’m your rebound. You and Genna broke up and then there I was, conveniently worshipping at your feet, and so you—”
“That’s bullshit.” You’ll move closer to me, but I’ll back away. Maybe I’m going too far with this fantasy, but it’s like a scene in a movie and I want to be the badass heroine who tells the jerk boyfriend to fuck off. “I was into you way before Genna and I broke up. I know you’re mad, but stop being such a bitch.”

This won’t hurt as much as it should because you’ve said it before, in various ways: fucking bitch, goddamned bitch. Say it enough and it doesn’t hurt anymore. That’s what I tell myself, anyway.

“You didn’t even know my name before you guys broke up—” It’ll look like I’ve got you there, but you’re smart, so smart.

You’ll say: “What about the shooting star?”

That goddamn star. It’s why I’ve stayed with you so long.

We’re lying on the ratty old picnic blanket your parents keep in the backyard. I’m feeling so unbelievably lucky that Gavin Davis wants to make out with me under the stars. Your parents aren’t home, but I’m terrified they’ll come and catch this girl they’ve never met wearing nothing but a bra and way too short skirt that their son is currently putting his hands under.

“Maybe . . . um . . . we shouldn’t . . .” I try to get the words out but stars, and fingers, and your lips, your lips.

Your mouth is against my ear and you whisper, “We definitely should.”

I pull away from you, confused. Thinking how dumb I am, that maybe you just want to hook up. I’m not that girl. I can’t be—even for you.

“Gavin. I really like you.”

“I don’t like you.” Everything turns to ice, but then you smile and
reach for me and your eyes get glassy and your voice is so soft when you say, “I love you.”

I don’t realize that you’re too good at one-liners and romantic moments. I think it’s just for me. That I somehow inspire it all.

Later, we lie on our backs, staring at the sky. And then—a shooting star. We gasp at the same time and you reach out and grip my hand.

“I’ve never seen one before,” I say.
You smile. “It’s a sign.”
“Of what?”
“That we’re meant to be together.”
“It wasn’t a sign,” I’ll say. I’m tired of you using the star to build a case for our cosmic love. I’m over it. “A shooting star is just a rock.”

Your eyes will narrow in that look that tells me you’re going to say something especially cruel. “Those girls in there—” You point back toward the party. “Do you know how many of them have tried to hook up with me since I started going to school here? They don’t have curfews. They’re on birth control. They don’t give a damn what Mommy and Daddy think and they have their own fucking apartments.”

“Great, then as soon as we break up, you can go fuck all of them in their fucking apartments!”

Your eyes will widen—you can’t believe I’ve got it in me to say any of that, can you? But then your lips will turn up and . . . and . . . I’ll see that you’re . . . amused—what? What. The. Fuck. I’ll be so mad I could spit, but you’ll start cracking up and suddenly I’ll feel ridiculous.
“Stop laughing at me,” I’ll say. I’ll still be clutching my phone and I’ll need to call Erin, I’ll need to call her and tell her to pick me up.

“I’m not laughing at you!”

I’ll look and it’s true—you’ll be smiling like the Gavin I fell for, back when we were both in high school. You’ll lay your palms against my cheeks and it’ll be like a scene from a movie where people get together in the end.

“I’m so in love with you, Jessa, you have no idea.”

“What?”

Bingo. You got me.

Because I’ll be so confused. Two seconds ago you were listing all the reasons dating me is a total buzzkill. Then you swoop in with a romantic declaration.

You’ll lean closer and I’ll hate that my body responds to that.

How can I still want you?

“I’m sorry.”

You’ll whisper the words. Bedroom talk. “I said that thing about the girls to see if you’d be jealous. I had to know if you still . . . if you still wanted me.”

Your mind games. God, you’re so good at keeping me off balance.

“That’s messed up, Gavin!” I’ll actually hit you with my purse and it’ll feel good to hear the smack of the leather against your skin.

But you’ll smile. “You’re so goddamn sexy when you’re mad. You’re like this fierce goddess—”

“Gavin, stop. Just stop, okay?”

I’ll step away from you. Erin told me I had to do it tonight.
That this was the final straw. The one that broke the camel’s back. The . . . the . . . oh God, whatever all those expressions are, this is all of that.

“No more. No more this or us or . . . just. No more. Please.” I’ll be begging you. Please let me end this. Please, please.

You’ll suddenly turn serious. “I’m sorry about the prom. I know you wanted to go. I just . . . Jessa, I’m twenty years old. Like, I love you and I want to make you happy, but I can’t go to a high school prom.”

“And that’s fine, I get it, but this was my prom and I’ll never have another one—”

“I don’t think it’s crazy for me to be uncomfortable with the idea of you dancing with other guys all night.”

I’ll throw up my hands, frustrated. “Gavin, I told you I was going to dance with my friends as a group and sit out all the slow songs.”

“I was gonna tell you to go without me,” you’ll say. “I really was. I knew how much it meant to you and I thought, There’s nothing to worry about—you trust her. But then I saw those pictures.”

I know you’ll bring this up because it’s been our daily argument for the past two weeks.

You saw the pictures from the cast party on my phone and how Adam and I were always sitting next to each other, laughing. Even though it was five months ago and nothing fucking happened, you completely freaked out. Wouldn’t give me my phone back until you searched through my emails. And I let you. I let you. Because I don’t know how to say no to you.

“That’s bullshit,” I’ll say, totally pissed off. “Like I’ve told you a
million times, I have never done anything wrong—I would never cheat on you.” This is the truth.

“I saw the way you were looking at each other in those pictures.”

“You saw pictures of me sitting next to a guy who wasn’t you and decided there was something going on—which there isn’t,” I’ll say. “We go to school together every day. If I wanted to cheat on you, I could have. So what does it matter if I go to prom and he’s there?”

“You’ll dance with him, for one.”

“His name is Adam, not him, and no, I wouldn’t have, because he has his own prom date—”

“So the only reason you wouldn’t dance with him is because he has a date.”

“That’s not what I meant,” I’ll say. “You’re putting words in my mouth.”

I’ll take off my heels because my feet will be in excruciating pain and I’ll throw them against the brick wall we’re standing next to but will wish I could throw them at you because here we are, spinning on a merry-go-round from hell.

“Stop being such a child,” you’ll snap.

“If I’m such a child, then why are you with me?” I’ll feel hopeful when I say this—maybe you’ll be pissed off enough to break up with me. Maybe I won’t have to do it.

You’ll shake your head. “Look, I don’t want to argue anymore. I’m just saying, shit happens on prom night and that’s why I wanted to keep you close, all right?” You’ll look down at me, slightly paternal. “I’m not okay with the possibility of my girlfriend screwing some guy from her drama class on prom night because she had too much to drink and he looked good in his tux.”
“I don’t even drink!” I’ll yell. Then I’ll lower my voice because we’re in public and there are some things you don’t shout from the rooftops, such as: “And I’m a virgin. And I’m well aware of the fact that I have a boyfriend and that means something to me, like not screwing other guys on prom night.”

I’ll start to walk away. Screw the heels, I’ll be barefoot, heading toward the bus stop. But you’ll run after me, suddenly panicked.

“Jessa.” You’ll grab my arm and I’ll try to shake you off, but you’re holding on too tight. I’ll probably have a bruise. “Okay, I’m sorry.” Your voice will go soft. “Is that what you want to hear? I’m sorry I didn’t trust you, I’m sorry I love you so much. I’m sorry.”

“Gavin . . .”

“Listen. I know I have to work on the jealousy thing. It just makes me crazy, not being able to be with you—you parents, your schedule.” I’ll try to pull away, but I’m starting to lose steam. “If you’re not happy by the end of the summer, then okay, you can leave me. But you owe us the summer at least.”

When I told you that after I graduate, I won’t have a curfew anymore, you literally jumped in the air and shouted, a huge smile spreading across your face. I’ll remember that moment and the doubt will creep in.

“It’s just been so hard lately,” I’ll whisper. Suddenly I’ll feel so tired. I won’t have the energy to have this same fight again.

“I know. But I’m telling you, it’s going to be so great. We’re going to be so great.”

Those one-liners of yours get me every time, make me feel like I’m on-screen, people watching us as they eat popcorn. But this isn’t a movie, it’s my life and it sucks.

“I don’t know, Gav. It just feels like . . . we can’t fix this.”
There’s a moment of silence, and I’ll think I’m finally getting through to you, but then you’ll say: “Do you want to know what I did last weekend, when you were studying for finals?” You’ll tilt my chin up, so that you can look in my eyes. “I went ring shopping.”

I’ll go hot, then cold. “What?”

“I didn’t buy it yet,” you’ll say. “Need to save more money. But I have it all planned out, how I’ll ask you.” You’ll be bashful then, a soft, secret smile playing on your face. The ice around my heart will start melting. Not in a good way, in a global-warming way. But it’s not frozen anymore and that’s all that matters in this moment. “Jessa, I want to spend the rest of my life with you.”

All that frustration in my chest will explode, silently, so only I’ll know it’s happening. Everything will feel dark and bad and hopeless inside me and I’ll sit right there on the sidewalk and bury my head in my hands. I won’t know if I’m crying because right at that moment my friends are at prom, having the night of their lives, or because I’ll know that we’re not breaking up. Not then, maybe not ever.

You’ll reach down and pick me up and cradle me against you (cradle robber), thinking I’m crying from happiness.

I’ll be dead weight.
I’m breaking up with you today.

I’m wearing a necklace made of beads, each one a promise to myself that I will break up with you. The first bead is the one Adam gave me, way back when, the sea-green one with the white swirls.

I’m breaking up with you even though you might try to kill yourself (and I don’t think you will—you love yourself too much to do that).

I’m breaking up with you right before graduation. Because I won’t let you ruin this day. I won’t let you take one more thing away from me.

I’m breaking up with you because I’m going to spend the whole summer with the friends I’ve neglected for the past two years. And then I’ll go to a college far away. I’ll be by myself for a while. Then I’ll find someone I don’t want to break up with.

This is how it will go down:

You’ll get my text and a few minutes later, you’ll be walking toward me.

I’ll have asked you to meet me in the high school parking lot because it’s a public place. Because I don’t trust you anymore. I’m scared to be alone with you. My best friend will be standing a few feet away. She has promised to break up with you for me, if I don’t do it. I gave her permission to drag me away from you, if need be. She would do it, too.
You’ll smile when you see me and dance a little jig because this is the day we’ve been waiting for. But I’m going to make it the worst day of your life. I’ll be sick with nerves and sad and I’ll hate that a part of me still loves you, still lifts a little when you walk toward me with that slacker shuffle.

“How’s my girl?” you’ll say when you reach me.

I’ll feel the cracks spreading through my heart as it starts to break. You’ll be wearing the tie I bought you—the one with the skull and crossbones. I know you love it. I know you’re wearing it for me. “Jessa?”

I’ll grip the necklace. It’s too late for Adam and me, but I’m okay with that. Because it’s not too late for me. It feels good to be selfish, but it’s hard.

I’ll open my mouth, but the words won’t come. Despite everything, I won’t want to break your heart. And I won’t want you to break mine. I just want us to . . . drift away from each other. I’ll wish there didn’t have to be words. Or that you, for once, could be the one who has to say the hard thing.

“What happened?” you’ll ask. You are Concerned Boyfriend. I am Asshole Girlfriend.

Tears will be filling my eyes by this point and I’ll shake my head. I’ll think about how Erin will have to put more bobby pins in my hair because my mortarboard will be slipping off.

Your hands will grip my arms, your skin warm on mine. “Baby, what’s wrong?”

Oh, God, you’ll think it’s not you, that there was some kind of graduation drama. Your voice will be sweet and I’ll know you want to protect me and it’ll be too much. The end of high school, the
end of us. The beginning of everything else. *I don't know if I can do this.* I’ll turn my head and see Erin hiding behind someone's SUV. It’ll make me feel strong, knowing someone has my back.

“We’re breaking up. Right now. Please don’t say anything.” The words will come out in a rush and sweat will be dripping off me and *Please, God, please let me really do it this time.*

*You have no idea how hard it is to love you.*

*You’re such a wet blanket.*

*Tease.*

*Bitch.*

*Stop being such a child.*

*You’re lucky I love you so much.*

You’ll stare at me. For once, you won’t say a word. Because you’ll know I mean it this time.

And then I’ll walk away from you.

I won’t look back.