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# ★ BETSY AND TAYLOR ★

BY GRACE MUNOZ

WITH MEL DAVIS-KAY AND YSABEL MUNOZ

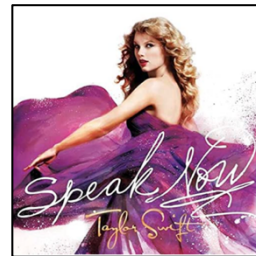
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In an alternate magical reality (one where Taylor pops out of the *Folklore* piano right into Uncle Keith's trunk), I believe Betsy Ray would have *adored* Taylor Swift. Taylor's themes about high school, boys, being true to oneself, appreciating the natural world – as well as her ability to capture complex emotions in a phrase – all would resonate with Betsy. Taylor's songs walk us through the emotions of growing up, just as each high school book does with Betsy. The question of finding songs to represent themes in the books, then, really becomes, "Which song does *not* apply?"

(For Swiftie purists, know that to narrow down the choices, twenty-somethings Mel and Ysabel helped me evaluate the general vibe of songs, rather than apply each individual phrase. We're **just hitting the high spots!**)

Oh, that first insecure year in high school. In *Heaven to Betsy*, Betsy encounters what is likely the most significant change in her life since Margaret was born and her family moved her from her precious childhood home and close proximity to Tacy. The perfect song mate is *Speak Now*'s "Never Grow Up," where Taylor reflects on losing her childhood and missing simpler times.

“ Take pictures in your mind of your  
childhood room  
Memorize what it sounded like when  
your dad gets home  
Remember the footsteps, remember  
the words said  
And all your little brother's  
favorite songs . . . ”



But then, lo and behold, Betsy's new house becomes a hub of social activity; her world expands with new friends and especially *boys*. Which song could fit this better than "15" from *Fearless*, right down to starting high school with a redheaded best friend!



“ You sit in class next to a redhead  
named Abigail  
And soon enough, you're best friends ”

*It's like Taylor wrote it with Tacy in mind.*

Let's face it: Betsy is absolutely boy-crazy! Just before freshman year, she meets Joe Willard at Butternut Center and feels an instant connection – not only is he good-looking but *he likes to read*.

Though her flirting skills are not yet advanced enough to reel in the boy, her fluttery feelings are perfectly reflected in *Speak Now's* "Enchanted":



“ The playful conversation starts  
Counter all your quick remarks  
... It was enchanting to meet you ”

Betsy fantasizes about meeting a "TDS" – a tall, dark stranger. Magically, at Christian Endeavor she meets Tony, and their encounter is, for her, life altering. Cue "Everything Has Changed" from *Red*:



“ 'Cause all I know is we said, "Hello"  
And your eyes look like comin' home  
All I know is a simple name  
And everything has changed  
... I just wanna know you better ”

Oh Betsy! She hides her crush on Tony from Bonnie, who sees an opening and swoops in. Tony and Bonnie are soon an item, and Betsy is heartbroken. Taylor excels at lyrics about pining for a boy! The perfect match for Betsy's current mood is *Taylor Swift's* "Teardrops On My Guitar":



“ I fake a smile so he won't see  
That I want and I'm needing everything that we should be  
I'll bet she's beautiful, that girl he talks about  
And she's got everything that I have to live without ”

Then, in a stunning upset, Bonnie moves back to Paris, causing Tony to head straight back to Betsy. A jaded Betsy sees through his act, bringing us to *Fearless's* "White Horse":



“ I was a dreamer before you went and let me down  
Now it's too late for you and your white horse  
To come around ”

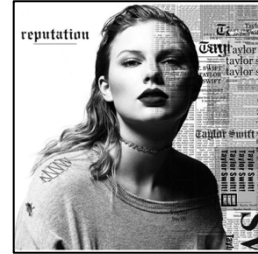
Drama with the Crowd isn't the only thing filling Betsy's life. She competes in the Essay Contest against none other than Enchanting Joe Willard. Yet Betsy is so busy being a social butterfly that she does not prepare adequately. After a humiliating public defeat, Betsy realizes that writing is deeply essential to her core self. Uncle Keith's trunk returns to her



bedroom as a physical reminder that she shouldn't neglect her talent ever again. Betsy figuring out her mission aligns with "A Place in This World" from Taylor's first album:

“ I'm alone, on my own  
And that's all I know,  
I'll be strong, I'll be wrong  
Oh, but life goes on  
Oh, I'm just a girl  
Trying to find a place in this world ”

In *Betsy in Spite of Herself*, Betsy is still drawn to Joe and is hurt when he is dismissive of her. She's tired of being the girl next door whom boys like but don't fall in love with. While visiting Tib in Milwaukee, Betsy has the grand idea to try on a new personality with new name and a signature color and perfume to go with it. The *Reputation* album is about Taylor trying on a new personality, and "Look What You Made Me Do" reflects Betsy becoming Betsye:



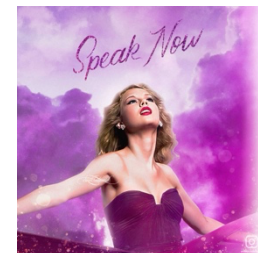
“ I'm sorry  
But the old Taylor can't come to the phone right now  
Why? Oh, 'cause she's dead ”

Cruising back to Deep Valley with her new personality, Betsy hooks Phil Brandish, an exciting catch due to his wealth and red-hot auto. They are super crushing on each other, and Betsy is thrilled to be a "popular girl" at last. In 1989's "Style," Taylor reflects on dating for status and dressing in a fashionable, edgy way – and even mentions a car!



“ You got that James Dean daydream look in your eye  
And I got that red lip classic thing that you like  
And when we go crashing down, we come  
back every time  
'Cause we never go out of style ”

Putting on an act soon gets tiring, but when Betsy starts acting like herself, silly and gregarious, Phil is confused. His feelings are hurt as he thinks she's been making fun of him. What better song than *Speak Now's* "Back to December"?



“ So this is me swallowin' my pride  
Standin' in front of you sayin' I'm sorry for that  
night . . .  
I'd go back in time and change it, but I can't ”

Through this experience of putting on an act, Betsy learns the importance of being true to herself and valuing her own qualities. Of course Taylor has a song about loving yourself the way you are: “Me!” in *Lover*:

“ I’m the only one of me  
Baby, that’s the fun of me ”



In *Betsy Was a Junior*, Betsy is sure this is the year she and Joe will wind up together – and she’s crushed when Joe chooses stuck-up Phyllis for a first girlfriend. “You Belong with Me” from *Fearless* seems written for this exact moment, right down to the fancy clothes, automobile, and snooty attitude of the chosen girl:

“ If you could see that I’m the one  
Who understands you  
Been here all along  
So, why can’t you see?  
You belong with me ”



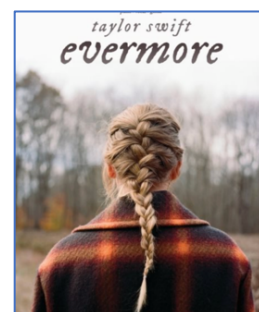
Betsy looks for something all-consuming to distract herself with and lands on creating a sorority, fitting the theme of “Bad Blood” from *Reputation*: getting back at someone by creating an insiders-only squad of only the toughest and coolest girls. You’re chosen to be in the club, or you’re out – just like a sorority.

“ Now we got problems  
And I don't think we can solve 'em . . .  
So if you come in my way, just don't ”



As for beaus, strong and silent Dave Hunt, a popular sports star, chooses Betsy – woo-hoo! Yet, this golden boy keeps her guessing, waiting, and unsure – which brings to mind “Gold Rush” from *Evermore*, where Taylor decides that waiting for the golden boy isn’t worth the status:

“ But I don't like a gold rush, gold rush  
I don't like anticipating my face in a  
red flush  
. . . Everybody wants you  
But I don't like a gold rush ”





The book ends romantically when Betsy receives a summer postcard from Joe, who wants to correspond with her. “Electric Touch” from *Speak Now (Taylor’s Version)* is all about the excitement of anticipating a new relationship.



“ I don’t wanna think about distance  
I just wanna be in your existence ”

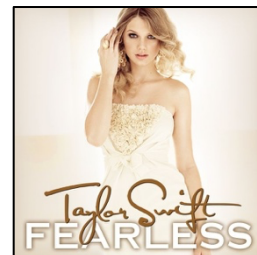
Cue senior year, with Betsy and Joe! Finally, finally, Joe Willard sees the light and falls for Betsy. But Tony, the TDS from three years ago, has also developed a romantic interest in her. What?! Betsy wants to friendzone Tony, yet is afraid he’ll fall in with a bad crowd. She decides not to be exclusive with Joe, hoping he’ll understand why. The theme of “Cruel Summer” from *Lover* feels right here, with Betsy trying to protect bad boy Tony:



“ I cried like a baby coming home from the bar  
Said, “I’m fine,” but it wasn’t true  
I don’t wanna keep secrets just to keep you ”

(And from Tony’s perspective, “I love you, ain’t that the worst thing you ever heard?”)

Also: Dating one boy while longing for another is clearly in “That’s the Way I Love You” territory from *Fearless*!



“ He’s charming and endearing  
And I’m comfortable  
But I miss screaming and fighting and  
kissing in the rain ”

This crazy love triangle explodes when Betsy accepts Tony’s invitation to the New Year’s Dance, causing Joe to break it off with her. “The Story of Us” from *Speak Now* speaks (see what I did there?) to this situation since it’s written in chapters (which reflects Betsy and Joe’s love of books) and describes existing in the same space, not speaking, but so hyper-aware of each other:



“ Oh, a simple complication  
Miscommunications lead to fallout  
So many things that I wish you knew  
So many walls up I can’t break through  
Now I’m standing alone in a crowded room ”

And we're not speaking and I'm dying to know  
Is it killing you like it's killing me?

”

Betsy finally ends things with Tony, and she and Joe reconcile – though tentatively at first, bringing to mind 1989's “Out of the Woods,” where a fragile relationship evolves into a strong one.



“ I remember thinking  
Are we out of the woods yet?  
. . . Are we in the clear yet? ”

Betsy wins the Essay Contest, the sweethearts graduate, and their beautiful song pair is “This Love,” also from 1989:

“ This love is alive back from the  
dead, oh, oh, oh  
These hands had to let it go free,  
and  
This love came back to me ”



Betsy's love **comes back to her**. Like “Today Was a Fairytale” from *Fearless*, Betsy and Joe float off together into the castle – or, in this case, college!

“ Can you feel this magic in the air?  
It must have been the way you kissed  
me  
Fell in love when I saw you standing there . . .  
Today was a fairytale ”



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GRACE MUNOZ is a former special education lawyer and current Hebrew school teacher who in third grade plagiarized Maud's story of Betsy and Tacy floating on the feather above Deep Valley for a creative writing assignment in a misguided attempt to see if her new teacher would recognize it and be a kindred spirit. (Sadly, the teacher did not and was not, so the noble effort was just cheating.)