

Force of Nature

written by

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EXT. TRAIL - MORNING

TOMMI (16, they/them), tough, edgy, experimenting with their identity, runs along a trail. Autumn colors envelope the scene.

INT. TOMMI'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Tommi enters their kitchen. Their DAD (40s) is cooking. Their MOM (40s) reads a book and drinks coffee.

TOMMI'S DAD
Morning, Tommi.

TOMMI
Morning. Dad, can I borrow one of
your shirts to wear to school
today?

Tommi's mom and dad exchange a glance.

TOMMI'S DAD
Go ahead, take whatever you want.

TOMMI
Thanks.

INT. DAD'S CLOSET - MOMENTS LATER

Tommi holds a shirt up and looks at their reflection in the mirror. They smile.

INT. TOMMI'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Tommi skips down the stairs wearing a white long sleeve tee layered with a boxy button up shirt and khaki shorts.

Tommi passes ANGIE (18, she/her), their older sister and guiding force, in the foyer.

ANGIE
Aren't those similar to your
regular clothes? Why'd you have to
go and borrow Dad's?

TOMMI
Because my clothes are women's
clothes pretending to be men's.
These are actually men's clothes,
Angie.

Angie considers this.

ANGIE
They look good on you. I'm impressed you had the guts to wear them.

Tommi grins.

TOMMI
Bye Mom! Bye Dad! Cleo's picking me up for school!

MOM (O.S.) DAD (O.S.)
Bye, honey! Love you! See ya!

They leave out the door.

EXT. TOMMI'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

CLEO (16, she/her), an awkward little goofball who'd do anything for her friends, sits at the driver's seat. She gets out and opens the passenger side door for Tommi.

Tommi gets in.

TOMMI
For someone who doesn't want a boyfriend, you sure know chivalry.

CLEO
I told you, I don't need a man when I have my friends.

TOMMI
Your rom-com obsession says otherwise.

CLEO
(climbing in)
Is that a new shirt? Suits you.

TOMMI
No, it's my dad's. But thanks. Is Ruby already at school?

CLEO
You know it.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

RUBY (16, she/her), intelligent, competitive, nothing gets done without her, walks with FRESHMAN ALICE.

RUBY

Sorry, Alice. I can't reschedule our tutoring session. Unless you're available at 5:45am on Thurs-

They pass the sign-up sheet for the fall festival parade competition. Ruby sees "SHELBY MARKS" (16, she/her) on the list and stops.

She fumes.

RUBY (CONT'D)

(to Alice)

Sorry, I have to go.

INT. LUNCH ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

She storms up to her friends, Tommi and Cleo at a table.

RUBY

We need to do the fall float competition this year. And we need to win.

Tommi is intrigued, almost hopeful.

TOMMI

Why?

RUBY

Because Shelby's doing it and I want to take her down.

Tommi deflates.

CLEO

Are you still mad she beat you in the science fair last year?

RUBY

Yes.

TOMMI

Ruby... That shouldn't be the reason you do the float.

RUBY

Why not? Shelby's a snake in lip gloss.

CLEO

(trying to calm Ruby)

You know what, this'll be fun!
It'll be like the time we almost got banned from Michaels! Craft-Gate of 2019!

Cleo and Ruby look to Tommi for an answer. Conflicted, they stare down and pick at their food.

Beat.

TOMMI

Fine. I'm in.

RUBY

Yay! You guys are the best. Let's start planning. We're going to need a killer theme if we're going to win.

(opens her notebook)

Oooo, what about..."slumber party"?

TOMMI

Alright.

CLEO

I love it.

CLEO (CONT'D)

You know, it's nice to see you excited about something. You've been in a rut since the breakup.

RUBY

It's nice to have something new to concentrate on.

Cleo and Tommi exchange a glance.

FADE IN:

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

Cleo, Ruby, and Tommi walk to class.

CLEO

So, you think you're finally over Zach?

RUBY

I've been over Zach.

Tommi scoffs.

TOMMI

That's what you said last week. And the week before. And the week be-

RUBY

Okay, okay, I get it. And yes. I'm officially over him.

CLEO

Good, 'cause there's this cute guy in my sign language class I could set you up with.

(sing-songy)

I think he's single.

RUBY

Mmmmm... Just be subtle about it, okay?

INT. ASL CLASSROOM - DAY

JONAH (16, he/him), sweet, charming, the kind of boy everyone wishes liked them in high school, looks at Cleo.

JONAH

I don't know...

CLEO

Come on, please?

Puppy eyes.

JONAH

Fine. I'll talk to her.

The ASL TEACHER (30s) comes by and scolds them.

ASL TEACHER

Voices off! I see lips moving, not hands!

CLEO

(signs, enthusiastic)

[Thank you! You won't regret it.]

INT. CLIMBING GYM - DAY

Tommi climbs on a wall. Their hands slip on the next hold and they fall to the mat.

Tommi winces. ANGIE gives Tommi a hand and lifts them up.

TOMMI

Urgh, I almost had that one.

ANGIE

You did, but you need to angle your left hip more towards the wall. That way, your center of gravity is closer to the wall and you can put more weight into your feet than your hands.

TOMMI

Okay, let me try it.

They start climbing again.

TOMMI (CONT'D)

Me, Ruby, and Cleo are doing the fall float competition.

ANGIE

I heard.

(beat)

You gonna win?

TOMMI

Ruby thinks so.

ANGIE

Well, if Ruby says so, then it has to happen.

They reach the problem hold.

Tommi secures their footing. They gracefully swing into the next position. They finish climbing the course.

Tommi jumps down, winded and excited.

Angie ruffles Tommi's hair.

ANGIE (CONT'D)

I knew you could do it.

EXT. CLEO'S DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

The three friends work on the float's base in Cleo's driveway. Ruby holds a plywood sheet while Tommi drills holes. Cleo hammers nails. They talk and laugh into the moonlight.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

SHELBY walks by and sees Ruby at her locker.

SHELBY
(snarky)
I saw you and your friends signed up for the float competition.

RUBY
(muttering)
Starting early today are we?

SHELBY
What, you didn't learn your lesson after the science fair?

RUBY
And you didn't learn your lesson after your nose job?

SHELBY
It's called a rhinoplasty. Spell that for me, babe.

RUBY
R-H-I don't care. At least my friends will build a float with me. Your friends are faker than your queen-bee status and have a group chat without you.

SHELBY
Wait, do they actually though?

Ruby nods sympathetically.

SHELBY (CONT'D)
(shakes it off)
Well my float's "mini golf" themed and I'm making my own fully-motorized windmill. Try topping that.

Ruby tries to hide her alarm.

RUBY
Why are you even doing this anyway?
I thought you didn't believe in nonacademic competitions.

SHELBY
It'll make a good college essay.
Show how well-rounded I am.
(MORE)

SHELBY (CONT'D)

(over her shoulder)

And by the way, Zach liked my idea
for the float. He seemed *really*
into it when I was telling him last
night.

Ruby's eyes go wide as she watches Shelby leave.

Lockers slam and Tommi and Cleo appear.

TOMMI

That was brutal.

CLEO

You're telling me.

RUBY

We need a new theme.

TOMMI

What's wrong with slumber party?

RUBY

It's not good enough. We're going
to need a showstopping idea if
we're going to blow everyone away.
And beat Shelby. Mostly beat
Shelby. Any ideas? Because I've got
none.

She looks to Tommi and Cleo.

CUT TO:

INT. HARDWARE STORE - DAY

Tommi wanders into an aisle, list and basket in hand. Angie follows behind them.

Tired, Tommi puts items on the shelf into the basket.

Angie sees a phallic-looking lamp and holds it up to Tommi, who feigns a smile. Angie puts back the lamp, her playfulness fading.

ANGIE

Hey, are you okay? You seem pretty
down.

TOMMI

I just... I don't know if I should
be doing the float.

(MORE)

TOMMI (CONT'D)

It brings up a lot and I don't want
to bring Cleo and Ruby down. We
already don't have a theme and I
don't see how I can help them.

ANGIE

Tommi, you're allowed to have a bad
week without quitting anything.
Your friends will understand.
(puts hand on shoulder)
You are a force of nature. You can
do this.

Tommi smiles.

TOMMI

Thanks, Angie.

Angie picks out a CARABINER from a rack and plops it into the basket.

ANGIE

You should get this.

FADE IN:

INT. HARDWARE STORE - MOMENTS LATER

Tommi returns to Ruby, who pushes a cart with Cleo.

TOMMI

Ruby, I got the stuff you asked
for.

Ruby picks at the items in the basket. She holds up the Gorilla glue, irritated.

RUBY

Tommi, you didn't get any of the
items on the list right! Like you
got Gorilla glue instead of wood
glue. You've been so spacey lately.
What's going on with you?

Tommi's shoulders droop.

CLEO

Ruby—

TOMMI

Sorry... I... I'll go and get them.

EXT. CLEO'S DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Ruby, Cleo, and Tommi paint the base of the float, which is now fully built.

EXT. TRAIL - MORNING

Tommi runs along the trail, pushing their legs as fast as they can.

Tears escape. They sprint faster. More tears until they can't hold it any longer.

They stop and hunch over, their shoulders shaking. They sob and gasp for air.

Beat.

They straighten and begin walking.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

RUBY WATCHES AS Shelby twirls her hair and talks to ZACH (16, he/him) by her locker. She laughs and playfully touches him on the shoulder.

Steam practically comes out of Ruby's nostrils.

INT. LUNCH ROOM - DAY

Ruby joins Cleo and Tommi at a table.

RUBY

It's gonna be tricky to get the float moving. The hardest part is connecting the engine to the axles and wheels, and making sure it actually steers. We're basically building a low-budget car.

Ruby pulls out her notebook and sketches a diagram of an engine.

TOMMI

All this goes under the float?

RUBY

Mmm-hmm, and...

Jonah sees the friends at the table.

JONAH

Cleo, hey.

CLEO

Jonah, hey!

Cleo scoots over to make room between her and Ruby.

Jonah sees the engine sketch.

JONAH

That's cool. Is that the engine for
the float?

CLEO

Yeah.

(to friends)

Guys, this is Jonah.

(to Jonah)

Jonah, this is Ruby. She's insanely
smart and can talk shop all day.
She's a gearhead like you.

JONAH

Oh yeah! You got second place at
the science fair last year, right?

Ruby winces.

RUBY

Yeah, hi.

CLEO

And this is Tommi. She's the
strongest person you'll ever meet,
physically and emotionally. She
does track and rock climbing.

Tommi winces at all the "shes".

JONAH

Hi.

TOMMI

Hey.

RUBY

(back to her notebook)

We're going to need the engine to
handle the weight of the float if
we want it to actually move.

JONAH

Most of the decorations are in the back, right? If you place the engine closer to the center of mass and link it to the wheels, it should move smoothly without tipping.

(motions to Ruby's pencil)
May I?

Ruby gives Jonah her pencil and Jonah adds to the sketch.

RUBY

That's a great idea.

JONAH

(to Cleo)

So, is this what you're doing when you're not practicing sign?

CLEO

I know, it's hard to imagine me having a life without you, right?

Jonah laughs. Ruby and Tommi exchange a look.

Cleo opens a bag of trail mix and turns to Jonah.

CLEO (CONT'D)

You're not allergic to almonds, are you?

JONAH

No.

CLEO

Okay, okay, that's good. Cause I eat a lot of almonds and if you were allergic, we wouldn't be able to...

Cleo short-circuits.

CLEO (CONT'D)

... co-exist.

Beat. Tommi coughs. Cleo bites on her almond and chews.

RUBY

Anyways....

FADE IN:

INT. LUNCH ROOM - LATER

Jonah says bye to the friends and gets up from the table. Once he's gone...

TOMMI

You teased him. I don't think I've ever seen you tease anyone in your life.

CLEO

(defensive)

Yes, I have. I tease you guys.

RUBY

That's because we've been friends for 6 years. It's hard for you to open up to people.

TOMMI

(snorts)

He sure opened something all right...

Cleo's cheeks turn red. Ruby high-fives Tommi.

CLEO

(to Ruby)

He's like a brother to me, you know?

RUBY

Cleo, you're an only child. How would you know what that feels like?

INT. CLIMBING GYM - DAY

Tommi drinks water from their squeezy bottle and places it back in their cubby.

The CLIMBING INSTRUCTOR speaks up to get everyone's attention.

CLIMBING INSTRUCTOR

Okay, everyone. We have some newcomers today, so we're going over the basics. We're learning how to fall safely. Falling is equally a part of the process as climbing. Only when we let ourselves fall, can we get back up and rise to greater heights.

Climbers gather around the mats.

From their peripheral, Tommi sees ESTER (20s, they/them), confident and completely themself, tying up their platinum hair to reveal it's an UNDERCUT.

Tommi is entranced by Ester's utter coolness and style.

Angie appears behind Tommi.

ANGIE

You should go up and say hi.

Tommi jumps a little. Looks back at Ester. Angie rolls her eyes and pushes Tommi towards Ester. Tommi stumbles and Ester turns around.

TOMMI

Uhhh... Hi. I like your...

Tommi rubs the nape of their neck to indicate the hairstyle.

Ester does a once-over of Tommi. Their queer-dar blares sirens. *They know.*

ESTER

Thanks, I did it myself. It's called an undercut. And it would look good on you too.

TOMMI

Do you think... you could do it on me?

Ester smiles.

EXT. CLEO'S DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Ruby, Cleo, and Tommi crouch beside a little control panel on the float's floor.

Ruby wipes off sweat from her brow. She inserts a key and turns it. We hear the glorious sound of the ENGINE ROAR and the friends cheer. They squeal, high-five, and hug each other.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Jonah runs into Cleo by her locker.

JONAH

Cleo!

CLEO

Jonah!

JONAH

How's the float going?

CLEO

Great! We finally got the engine working last night!

JONAH

That's sick! I'm happy for you guys.

CLEO

(nods along)

Yeah, I'm glad too because Ruby really wants to win.

JONAH

And what do you want?

CLEO

I just want to do something with my friends.

Jonah smiles.

CLEO (CONT'D)

So, what'd you think of Ruby?

JONAH

Uh... She's cool. Super smart, but—

CLEO

Isn't she? I knew you two would get along.

Jonah takes Cleo's books while she puts on her cardigan. He carries them for her as they head to class.

JONAH

Hey, do you want to study for the sign language test with me after school?

CLEO

Sure.

PAN TO around the corner, SHELBY EAVESDROPS on the entire conversation. She's scheming.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Shelby stops Ruby in the hall.

SHELBY

Ruby, you're clearly stressed. I can see the wrinkles forming on your forehead, and I know you can't afford Botox...

(Ruby rolls her eyes)

So I'm going to throw you a bone. If you and your friends drop out of the float competition, then you and I can partner in the science fair. That way, you won't lose again.

RUBY

(scoffs)

Why would I do that? You're only offering because you're threatened by our float and you know we're going to beat you.

SHELBY

Just think about it, okay? Junior year *is* the most important for college apps. And it's a guaranteed win for the fair.

RUBY

Bug off, Shelby.

Ruby walks away. When she's out of Shelby's sight, her face falls, torn.

INT. LIBRARY - AFTERSCHOOL

Cleo and Jonah sit across from each other at a table. Cleo gathers her FLASHCARDS and shuffles them into a neat deck.

Cleo fidgets. She's so awkward I'm surprised she's made it this far in life.

CLEO

Do you come here often?

JONAH

To the library? Yeah, I, uh, read a lot.

CLEO

Oh, what books do you read?

JONAH

Mostly sci-fi and manga.

CLEO

Is it man-gah or mun-gah?

JONAH

It's mun-gah. I just said.

CLEO

... I know. I don't why I asked
that.

Silence. God help this girl.

JONAH

By the way, I listened to that
album you were talking about.

CLEO

(perking up)

Fat of the Land by Prodigy? You
listened to my favorite album?

JONAH

Yeah. I liked it.

CLEO

What song was your favorite?

JONAH

"Breathe."

CLEO

That was my favorite at first, but
now the float's gotten me in the
mood for "Diesel Power."

Cleo hands the deck to Jonah.

CLEO (CONT'D)

So, why are you learning sign
language?

JONAH

My niece was born deaf. I wanted to
learn it for her.

CLEO

(lovestruck)

You have a niece?

JONAH

Yeah, she's like my favorite person
in the world.

Cleo swoons. Jonah holds up a flashcard and Cleo signs the vocab word.

CLEO

[Library.]

FADE IN:

EXT. LIBRARY - LATER

Jonah and Cleo stand in front of the library. Cleo doesn't know what to do with her hands.

JONAH

Bye.

CLEO

Bye.

Cleo watches Jonah walk away. She catches herself smiling.

CLEO (CONT'D)

(scolding herself)

Cleo, you can't like him. He's off limits.

EXT. CLEO'S DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Ruby glances around her and slips under the float. Her fingers trace the engine's tangle of wires until she finds the right strand. She SNIPS IT.

EXT. CLEO'S DRIVEWAY - NEXT DAY

The friends gather around the float. Ruby turns the key on the floor panel, but there's no engine roar.

CLEO

Why isn't it working? It worked two days ago.

RUBY

I don't know, let me go check.

Ruby looks under the float and inspects the engine.

RUBY (CONT'D)

Nothing looks wrong. It should be working. I don't know why it's not.

CLEO

What are we going to do?

Ruby debates her words, trying to find a way to break it to her friends.

RUBY

There's only a week left till the festival. We're not even halfway done with the decorations, we don't have a theme, and the engine isn't working. I hate to say it but... It's not looking good for us. I think we should drop out.

CLEO

(holding out hope)

Maybe we can fix it. Maybe there's still a chance...

Tommi takes a look at the engine. They find the SNIPPED WIRE.

TOMMI

Ruby, what's this?

Ruby freezes. Cleo walks over and Tommi shows her the wire.

TOMMI (CONT'D)

Do you think we're so stupid we wouldn't notice a wire is snipped on the engine?! We might not be taking AP classes and juggling 20 clubs like you, but we can see when something is blatantly wrong.

CLEO

(trying to calm Tommi)

Maybe it was Shelby...

TOMMI

Cleo, how would she know where your house is?!

Tommi and Cleo look to Ruby, who looks at the ground guilty.

TOMMI (CONT'D)

(shaking their head)

Unbelievable.

CLEO

But... why?

RUBY

(pleading)

Shelby made me. She said if we dropped out of the float competition, the two of us could partner together in the science fair.

Tommi lets out a dry laugh. Tears well up in Cleo's eyes, heartbroken.

CLEO

So you chose Shelby... over us?

Tommi walks away, fed up.

TOMMI

I can't deal with this.

BEGIN FIGHT MONTAGE:

... Ruby walks with FRESHMAN ALICE down the hall. Tommi and Cleo pass by and she tries to smile at them. They ignore her.

... Ruby sees Cleo sitting in her ASL class and tries to wave. Cleo sees her and turns the other way in her chair.

... Ruby sees Tommi by their locker. They make eye contact and Ruby tries to speak. Tommi shuts the door and walks away.

... Ruby sits alone at the lunch table, waiting and looking for someone to sit with her.

END MONTAGE

INT. TOMMI'S BATHROOM - DAY

ESTER cuts Tommi's hair in front of the mirror. They comb out a strand with their fingers and cut the blunt ends.

TOMMI

Can I ask you a question?

ESTER

Sure.

TOMMI

How did you know you were non-binary?

Ester is unfazed (so coooool!).

ESTER

I've had thoughts throughout the years that I knew weren't the normal experience. Like I secretly hoped a plastic surgeon would abduct me and give me man features and a man body. I wanted my body to match how I felt without having to explain it. The idea sent shivers down my spine, but it also thrilled me.

(beat)

I thought about transitioning, but that wasn't it. I felt like I didn't belong to either gender, you know? I was just... me.

TOMMI

Yeah...

Ester makes a few last snips.

ESTER

Okay, done.

Tommi looks at themselves in the mirror. Their hair is cut into an UNDERCUT SHAG.

ESTER (CONT'D)

Do you like it?

Tommi turns their head and tousles their hair.

TOMMI

It feels... different.

ESTER

That isn't always a bad thing.

EXT. TRAIL - MORNING

Tommi runs on the trail. They round the bend into the

EXT. CEMETERY - MOMENTS LATER

Tommi sits in front of a gravestone.

Leaves crunch from footsteps. Cleo comes and sits next to Tommi.

CLEO

Hey.

TOMMI

Hi.

CLEO

Did you cut your hair?

TOMMI

Yeah.

Cleo flicks the CARABINER on Tommi's belt loop.

CLEO

And this?

Tommi shrugs.

CLEO (CONT'D)

Are you doing okay?

TOMMI

Yeah, I just wanted to see her.

Cleo and Tommi turn to the gravestone. "ANGELINE REESE" is written on it. The air between them grows still. Cleo looks at the ground, guilty.

TOMMI (CONT'D)

I don't think Ruby even remembers
that Angie won the float
competition two years ago...
No one in this town remembers
anything about her except that she
died.

Beat.

CLEO

Do you still talk to her in your
head?

TOMMI

All the time.

CLEO

What would she say about us
dropping out of the float
competition?

TOMMI

She would say we're being stupid
and that we shouldn't let a broken
float break us. We should get back
in there and at least try.

Cleo nods slowly.

CLEO

Then that's what we'll do. Come on,
I'll drive you back to your house.

Tommi smiles a little. They both stand up to leave, brushing
the leaves off their jeans.

CLEO (CONT'D)

I still can't believe Ruby
sabotaged our float. I don't get
why she gets so riled up by Shelby.

TOMMI

Ruby's just in denial. She's
secretly in love with Shelby and
doesn't know it yet. She gets off
on the fighting.

Cleo cocks her head. *Huh.*

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Cleo walks up to Ruby by her locker. She tries to sound
braver than she feels.

CLEO

Hey, I know we're not really
talking right now, but Tommi needs
us. I found her at the cemetery
this morning. Remember Angie won
the float competition two years
ago? Building our float helped
Tommi feel closer to Angie. We
can't take that away from her. We
need to finish... Will you help?

RUBY

I- I didn't know. I never wanted to
hurt her. I'll help. We'll make
this right. I promise.

(hugs Cleo, whispers)

Thank you.

EXT. CLEO'S DRIVEWAY - DAY

Tommi joins Ruby and Cleo. The float is still unfinished.

RUBY

Thanks for coming. I know things
have been tense...

Tommi shrugs.

RUBY (CONT'D)

I acted like a jerk. I messed up
and I'm sorry. I let my jealousy
get in the way and ruin things for
everyone. Most of all, I ignored
your feelings. But I don't want to
do that anymore. If you'll let me,
I really want to finish the float
with you guys and compete in the
competition.

TOMMI

What about Shelby? Don't you want
to partner with her for the science
fair?

RUBY

This isn't about Shelby. Or the
fact I hate her and her perfect
nose.

Cleo and Tommi exchange a glance.

RUBY (CONT'D)

It's about us.
(takes Tommi's hands)
And Angie.

Tommi sighs.

TOMMI

Thanks, Ruby. Really. But it wasn't
just you. I've... I've been
distant. And confused. And I didn't
tell you both what was actually
going on.

(breathing shakily)

It wasn't just Angie. I've... I've
been figuring stuff out about
myself. Like the other day, Cleo,
when you were telling Jonah about
me and you kept saying "she"? It
felt wrong. Like you were talking
about someone else.

(MORE)

TOMMI (CONT'D)

Or, Ruby, when you say "girls night". I know you don't mean it like that, but still... Those words don't fit me anymore. And if it's okay with you guys, I think I'd like to start going by they/them.

CLEO

Oh my god, Tommi, I'm so sorry. I didn't realize. You were really brave to tell us. Of course we can do that.

RUBY

We love you. Whoever you choose you be. And for the record? Anyone who doesn't respect that is gonna have to deal with me.

Cleo initiates a group hug.

RUBY (CONT'D)

(breaking away)

Okay, come on. We've got a float to finish.

TOMMI

But how? The competition is tomorrow and the float isn't even halfway done.

CLEO

Ruby?

Tommi and Cleo look to Ruby. Ruby does what she does best: she creates a plan.

RUBY

We can do it. I know we can. But we're going to need backup. Cleo, you need to call Jonah.

Cleo freaks.

CLEO

What— No! I can't do that! You should call him.

RUBY

(shaking head)

Cleo, he likes you. You should call him.

CLEO

What?! No he doesn't.

RUBY

Yes, he does.

Tommi nods too.

CLEO

But—

RUBY

Do you not like him?

CLEO

(shaking head)

No—

RUBY

Do you not think he's cute?

CLEO

No— he's pee-a-little cute.

TOMMI

What does that even mean?

CLEO

It means I pee a little every time
he looks at me.

TOMMI

That's not pee.

RUBY

Well if that's how you feel, then
what are you so afraid of?

CLEO

... all of it?

RUBY

Oh, Cleo. You can do it. I know it
seems scary, but you're stronger
than you think... Also? Pull
yourself together. We need him for
the float.

Cleo nods. Her hands tremble as she pulls out her phone. She takes a deep breath and calls Jonah.

FADE IN:

EXT. CLEO'S DRIVEWAY - LATER

Jonah's car pulls up outside Cleo's house. He gets out and waves at Cleo.

Cleo lights up. She forgets she's holding a screwdriver and waves back. It clangs on the ground. Jonah smiles.

Cleo sneaks a peek at Ruby. Now she has the go ahead...

CLEO

You look so outdoorsy today. You
look like a... national park.

Ruby and Tommi cringe.

RUBY

(clearing throat)

Thanks for coming. The engine's broken and we need your help to fix it. I think one of the wires' cut, but it's also finicky because we grabbed the parts from a junk yard. Tommi and I need to finish up the decorations, but maybe you and Cleo can take a look?

Jonah nods. They get to work.

Cleo and Jonah crouch beside the float and work on the engine.

JONAH

I'm glad you and your friends made up. You seemed so upset all week. You would smile, but it never quite reached your eyes.

CLEO

You noticed that?

JONAH

I notice everything about you.

CLEO

That can't be true.

JONAH

It is. I notice how you bite your nails to the nib when you're anxious, how you draw your Es like backwards 3s, and the glitter you had stuck on your cheek for, like, three days straight last week.

CLEO

Maybe you just have a good memory—

JONAH

It's selective.

CLEO

Then you have a good selective
memory—

JONAH

Selective to you.

CLEO

...

JONAH

Do you get what I'm trying to say?

CLEO

No?

JONAH

Let me start over... Cleo, I like
how your music taste is so weird—

CLEO

Wait, what's wrong with EDM?

JONAH

Nothing's wrong with EDM—

CLEO

I like EDM. And if I was a DJ my DJ
name would be MC Arm'n'hammer.

JONAH

Oh, like the baking soda?

CLEO

(confused)

What?—

JONAH

What?— Nevermind.

(takes a deep breath)

What I'm trying to say is that I
like that you like EDM. And I like
how you'd do anything for your
friends. I... Cleo, I like...

Jonah's heart races. Because words are scary and feelings are even scarier, he signs it.

JONAH (CONT'D)
[I. Like. You.]

Cleo lets out a soft gasp. She signs.

CLEO
[I. Like. You. Too.]

JONAH
Yeah?

CLEO
Yeah.

JONAH
Can I take you out sometime?

CLEO
Yeah.

Cleo wraps her arms around his neck and they hug.

BEGIN FLOAT MONTAGE:

... They make paper mache trees. Ruby bends the wiring. Jonah cuts strips, Cleo dunks them into a glue bucket, and Tommi pastes them on.

... They decorate the float floor and paint rocks.

... Cleo, Tommi, and Ruby approach people on the sidewalk.

Cleo and Tommi approach a WOMAN. They talk and the WOMAN shows them a photo on her phone.

Ruby talks to a MAN. She hands him a notepad and pen to write a note.

They approach more people.

... Night. Ruby, Cleo, and Tommi put on final touches.

END MONTAGE

EXT. STREET - THE DAY

The friends wait in a staging line with other floats. Ruby and Cleo stand to the side.

RUBY
We're almost up. Cleo, did you make sure everything is working?

CLEO

Yep. Jonah and I checked before
this.

Cleo looks across the street at Jonah standing in the crowd.
She smiles. He sees her and smiles back. Ruby rolls her eyes.

RUBY

Is the grand finale in place?

CLEO

Mm-hmm. Tommi's over there right
now. They'll be ready at your
signal.

RUBY

Okay. It's go-time, kids.

They return to their float.

FADE IN:

EXT. PARADE LINE - LATER

The streets are blocked off for the fall festival parade.
Crowds line the sidewalks and floats roll past.

Shelby's mini-golf float rolls past with its own FULLY-MOTORIZED WINDMILL. Shelby stands in the middle and waves like a pageant princess.

More floats pass.

Cleo, Ruby, and Tommi enter with their float, revealed in full for the first time.

It's a nature trail. There are paper mache trees with fairy lights wrapped around them. Handwritten notes and photos hang from the branches. Painted rocks decorate the floor.

Tommi steers with a disguised joystick. They wear a NON-BINARY FLAG PIN on their shirt. Cleo and Ruby toss handfuls of paper leaves into the crowd.

The crowd cheers. Jonah applauds from the front row. Judges take notes on clipboards.

They reach the center of the lineup.

RUBY

(to Tommi)

Now!

Tommi presses a button. Cannons go off. Confetti bursts into the air. The crowd oohs and ahhhs.

Suddenly, the ENGINE SPUTTERS. The friends look at each other in panic as the float lurches and stops.

RUBY (CONT'D)
 Urgh! Come on, we need to push!
 We'll get disqualified if we don't
 make it to the finish!

She jumps off the float and gets behind it. Cleo and Tommi follow and start pushing.

The float doesn't budge with just them three. Jonah leaves the crowd and helps push. The WOMAN and MAN from the earlier montage, other townspeople, and ESTER come help.

RUBY (CONT'D)
 Don't die on me now. Push!

Together, they all push the float to the end of the parade.

Ruby wipes sweat from her brow and pulls Cleo and Tommi in for a hug.

CLEO
 (panting)
 Oh my god, that was crazy!

TOMMI
 Do you think we can still win?

RUBY
 Oh, no shot. But who cares? We actually did that!

FADE IN:

EXT. AWARD STAGE - LATER

Everyone crowds around the award stage. Cleo meets Jonah, giddy from excitement.

JONAH
 You guys did great!

CLEO
 You think so?

JONAH
 Yeah. I liked the confetti at the end. The trail looks familiar.

CLEO

Thanks! It's inspired by Tommi's favorite running trail. They made their own path. Incredible, right?

Jonah nods. A JUDGE approaches the mic and the crowd falls silent.

JUDGE

The town showed up in full color today. Thank you to all the contestants and their extraordinary floats. After careful consideration from our panel, we are ready to announce the results. The winner of this year's fall festival float competition is...

The town is on the edge of their seats. PAN TO the friends holding hands. PAN TO Shelby lifting her chin smugly.

Beat.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Alice Camden for her "slumber party" float!

Cheers erupt, deafening and wild. Shelby is horrified.

Alice's eyes grow wide as she looks around. She didn't expect to win. The crowd pushes her on stage.

Ruby, Cleo, and Tommi clap for Alice. The judge hands her the mic.

ALICE

I- I don't know what to say. Thank you to my friends, family, and dog for supporting me along the way. And Ruby for tutoring me on physics and engineering. I couldn't have done it without you. I think this may be the best day of my life...

The audience claps. The judge takes the mic.

JUDGE

Though there can only be one winner, there was another float that stole our hearts. I'd like to call up Ruby, Cleo, and Tommi's team for their "force of nature" float as our "Honorable Mention"!

Everyone cheers. The friends scream and hug. Ruby approaches Shelby.

RUBY

I'm sorry for all the mean things I said about you. I didn't mean it and I actually think your nose is really cute. Your windmill was amazing. They way you got the blades to self-regulate so that they'd move the same speed despite the wind? Insane. I know it wasn't part of the deal, but I'd still like to partner with you for the science fair. I think together, we'd be unstoppable.

Shelby blinks at her, stunned.

SHELBY

(sheepish)

Thanks.

Ruby, Cleo, and Tommi walk up to the stage.

The judge hands the mic to Ruby. Ruby looks down at it. She hands it to Tommi and gives an encouraging nod.

Surprise flickers across Tommi's face. They square their shoulders and stand up tall.

TOMMI

Thank you everyone for getting our float to the finish line. Also, thank you to everyone who gave us a note or photo of someone they thought was a force of nature. We got photos of friends, parents, and siblings. One of the photos up there is of my older sister, Angie. She's a force of nature because she was always so positive and the best sister anyone could've asked for.

(hesitates, choking up)

When she died, I closed myself off. I didn't want to reveal parts of myself because I thought no one could understand me the way she did. I was scared to be seen.

(looks at Cleo and Ruby)

But then my friends saw me and I realized I didn't need to be scared.

(MORE)

TOMMI (CONT'D)

And when we surround ourselves with people who lift us up, it helps us be brave.

I'd like to dedicate this float to my sister, Angie, who's always believed in me and lifted me up when I'm down. It's because of her, all of you, and my friends, that I can be a force of nature.

Tommi looks at their proud parents waving in the audience. Angie stands between them and smiles.

TOMMI (CONT'D)

I miss you, sis.

The audience applauds. Tommi hands the mic back to the judge.

Music starts to play. Tommi rushes down to their parents and pulls them on stage. Tommi beckons Ester to follow.

Ruby waves over Shelby and Cleo beckons Jonah.

Jonah comes on stage with his brothers. He's an IDENTICAL TRIPLET.

CLEO

There's three of him?!

Jonah and his brothers each dance with Cleo, Ruby, and Tommi.

Cleo taps Jonah from behind. He looks the other way. When he looks back, Cleo kisses him.

Everyone on stage dances. ZOOM OUT to an aerial of the town in autumn glow.

FADE OUT.

THE END.