

Idle Academia

CHARACTERS:

DR. EVELYN BLOOMBERG, 50

JAMES BRENNAN, 27

RACHEL BLOOMBERG, 21

MR. WILLIAM BLOOMBERG, 56

RYLIE HEARST, 22

Act I, Scene I

Academic Office Room

September 2008

EVELYN is seated at her desk in an academic office. Her legs are up on the desk and there is a flip phone pressed to her ear. She flips through a packet.

EVELYN: Well, Richard... Richard you know how things are these days with him... No, yeah. Listen, William and I need someone to make an offer by—by at least the end of November. A *good* offer. Yes, this year... Okay, so why isn't anyone buying shit right now? I don't understand... Subprime rates? I'm a professor, Richard not a fucking economist. This doesn't seem like my problem... No, no, to me it seems like *your* problem. *(She lowers her legs.)* Richard, I don't give a fuck about mortgages. No, that's what I pay *you* to think about. I care about the money, Richard. And you should too. Let me ask something—how's your daughter doing? Oh yeah? Well I'm sure she'd appreciate not being homeless on Christmas this year. Yes, I'm threatening you Richard. Are you fucking stupid? Are you fucking—

A knock.

EVELYN: Damnit. Come in! *(to the phone)* I gotta go. Yeah. Bye. *(dramatically flipping the phone shut)* Dick.

JAMES enters.

JAMES: Dr. Bloomberg?

EVELYN: Yes, yes, sit down. *(flipping through papers on her desk)* You're... you're John right?

JAMES: James.

EVELYN: James! James. Nice to meet you, James. *(She reaches over the desk to shake his hand.)* So I'm your advisor now, huh?

JAMES: Looks like it.

EVELYN: Well I'm excited to advise you on... *(flipping through papers)* What does your thesis concern again?

JAMES: The poetics of female agency and tragic resistance.

EVELYN: Oh. Oh! Of course, I think I have that somewhere in here. My daughter is into that feminist poetry stuff, too.

JAMES: Well it's not exactly an examination of feminist narratives in the typical sense—

EVELYN: Actually, I have to make a call. If that's okay with you?

JAMES: Go ahead. *(JAMES gets up to leave.)*

EVELYN: No, no you can stay. It'll be real quick. I just need you to finish looking over this piece for me. *(EVELYN hands a packet and a pen to James and puts the flip phone to her ear.)*

JAMES: Oh, um, alright.

EVELYN: Hey. Yeah... Richard was being an asshole, as always. Well, of course I tried to be amicable with him... Okay but no one has made a reasonable offer on the place yet... Wait a minute. Are you at work? Well it doesn't sound like work. Are you at that cunt's house? Jesus. Yes you are. Yes William, you are, and you don't even have enough fucking decency to step away for a phone call. I thought you agreed to stop seeing her until things are finalized... Well you can wait a few more months... No, fuck *you!* William. William LISTEN TO ME! Okay, fine. Fine! Have fun fucking that bitch. *(flips the phone shut)* Asshole. *(to James)* Sorry. My husband. Did you finish that yet?

JAMES: *(meekly)* Yeah.

EVELYN: Good. Thank you. What did you think of what you read?

JAMES: Oh. It's—um—it's beautiful, actually. Heartbreaking, too. Did you have a specific inspiration for this piece?

EVELYN: Oh, I didn't write it. My daughter did. *She's* the poetry major.

JAMES: And she goes here?

EVELYN: Senior, actually. All grown up now.

JAMES: (*handing back the packet and pen*) Well, she is a true talent.

EVELYN: Yeah, she's a sensitive one alright. Guess that's how she writes her more gooey stuff. Let's talk about you now, yeah? Tell me about this thesis. Is this something you want to continue researching after graduation?

JAMES: I actually want to pursue a career in writing.

EVELYN: No shit, huh! Well let me tell ya (*leaning in*) you're making the right choice avoiding all this academia bullshit. Too many rules and tribulations. If I wasn't tenured I would quit and work in publishing like my husband. That's where the real money is.

JAMES: Your husband works in publishing?

EVELYN: William owns Bloomberg Publishing, yes. (*beat*) You're in your third year, correct? Why transfer advisors now?

JAMES: Dr. Hailer asked that I transfer, actually. We just had... differences of opinion.

EVELYN: Don't lie to me James.

JAMES: I'm not—

EVELYN: Then I know you're not about to ask me to meet with William, right? I don't suppose you requesting me as your new advisor had anything to do with my husband?

JAMES: Um, —

EVELYN: Well, I don't care. He's an asshole. But if I invite you to meet him I want something from you.

JAMES: Anything, yes.

EVELYN: You need to help my daughter with her senior seminar project.

JAMES: Done.

EVELYN: Delightful! I must warn you, she can be a bit, um, temperamental at times. She's a compassionate girl, really, but sometimes her emotions, uh, get the best of her.

JAMES: I think I can handle—

The door to the office swings open. Enter RACHEL. She is sobbing loudly.

RACHEL: I'm going to KILL MYSELF! I'm going to kill myself and this will all be his fault! I can't do this anymore, mom, I'm gonna— *(She notices James.)* Oh. Sorry. *(Wiping her eyes and nose)* I didn't know anyone was—that my mom had anyone—I'm sorry. *(She begins to sob louder. She runs over to EVELYN, who embraces her as she cries.)*

EVELYN: It's okay, sweetie. Shh, shh.

JAMES: *(to himself)* Shit.

Act I, Scene II
The Bloomberg's Penthouse
September 2008

JAMES and WILLIAM are seated at a dining room table in the Bloomberg's lavish Manhattan penthouse. WILLIAM is reading through a manuscript, and JAMES anxiously watches. They sit in heavy silence for a few seconds. There is a door leading to the kitchen and another to the outside of the apartment.

JAMES: Thank you for—

WILLIAM: Eh eh eh.

JAMES: You have a lovely home.

WILLIAM: Stop.

JAMES: Sorry.

WILLIAM: Shut up.

A few more moments of intense silence. WILLIAM closes the manuscript and sets it on the table.

WILLIAM: I like it.

JAMES: Really? I appreciate you—

WILLIAM: Stop there. It still needs a lot of work. But it is very nuanced. You have a very compelling take on poverty, Mr. Brennan. Destitution, the life of the lower class—this is exactly what people want to read right now. They want to know—to understand—the addicts, the beggars, the transients of society. Your characters perfectly encompass this kind of lifestyle. However, I think you can exaggerate this kind of... deprivation.

JAMES: You mean like... make things worse for them?

WILLIAM: Precisely. Elaborate on their hardships. *That* is what gets people to read.

JAMES: This piece is autobiographical, Mr. Bloomberg. It's not supposed to be—to be poverty porn. I don't know if I can stay true to the nature of the story without—

WILLIAM: Mr. Brennan. James. Listen. I get it. You're from Queens, you have this tragic backstory. One bedroom apartment in Far Rockaway. A single mom who sluts herself out to pay rent. Get thrown out of place after place after things don't work out too well for her. But you have big dreams. Graduate early, get into NYU and then Columbia. I read stories from people like you all the time. But you—you've been able to... encapsulate this trauma into a really great narrative. I think you need to capitalize on this. I can give you everything you want, James. But you're gonna need to cooperate. People wanna feel a connection to their author. If I end up publishing this, you're gonna need to do press and tours and interviews. And I'm gonna need you to... embellish your story if you wanna get anywhere with this.

JAMES: Uh—

WILLIAM: Think about it, James. You have potential. Don't waste it, kid.

JAMES: I will. I will, thank you.

JAMES shakes WILLIAM'S hand and exits. EVELYN enters with two coffee mugs. She sets one down in front of WILLIAM and sits at the table. They hate each other.

EVELYN: James gone already?

WILLIAM: Obviously.

EVELYN: Think he's any good?

WILLIAM: Yeah. If he knows what's good for him he'll come back tomorrow with a revised copy.

EVELYN: He's got this inexplicable charm to him, right?

WILLIAM: I suppose.

EVELYN: Are you really going to be cold with me after I just brought you a potential prospect?

WILLIAM: I'm not being cold, I'm being concise, Evelyn.

EVELYN: Yeah well it seems like you're kind of pissed off at me.

WILLIAM: Jesus.

EVELYN: See!

WILLIAM: I wasn't pissed off until you said I seemed pissed off! I'm just tired.

EVELYN: Tired because of what? Because you clearly haven't been at work all week.

WILLIAM: You're acting crazy.

EVELYN: You don't think I see the hickeys on your neck? The shitty foundation that rubs off onto your collar? You smell like a Marc Jacobs perfume every day you come home, Will. I know you're still fucking that cheap slut.

WILLIAM: Okay, and what if I am?

EVELYN: You couldn't at least wait until our divorce was finalized to pull this kind of shit?

WILLIAM: Evelyn! (*whispers*) Rachel is here.

EVELYN: (*whispering*) Shit. Fuck. I thought Riley picked her up already. Do you think she heard me?

EVELYN and WILLIAM are now whisper fighting.

WILLIAM: I don't know! You're always raising your god damn voice.

EVELYN: Like you don't yell at me every fucking day?

WILLIAM: Fuck you.

EVELYN: Die!

Enter RACHEL.

RACHEL: Hi guys.

WILLIAM: Hi honey!

RACHEL: Everything alright?

EVELYN: Yes, dear—

WILLIAM: I was just meeting with some talent.

RACHEL: Okay...

WILLIAM: When is Riley coming?

RACHEL: I'm not sure—hey, I was just looking through this book and I found this really cute resort right outside of Paris and I was thinking we could go there together this spring after graduation? It's very quiet and they have a really nice view of the Eiffel Tower.

WILLIAM: Rachel, sweetie...

RACHEL: What?

WILLIAM: It's just...

EVELYN: Honey, the last time that we booked a Paris trip you decided that you didn't want to go last minute.

RACHEL: Well, that was last time.

WILLIAM: Last three times.

RACHEL: Okay? I was nervous—a couple of times— I’m sorry. But I’m taking a Paris urbanism class right now and I think I’m ready to see the city for myself.

EVELYN: Maybe you and Rylie could go there for the honeymoon!

RACHEL: Ew, don’t talk about that kind of stuff, Mom. Plus, I’d rather go to Paris with you guys!

EVELYN: Well, I mean we’d love to but... Don’t you think it’s time for you to spread your wings, sweetie?

RACHEL: Spread my wings?

WILLIAM: See the world for yourself? With someone you love by your side?

RACHEL: Well, I love you two.

EVELYN: We mean with Rylie.

RACHEL: You guys act like he’s proposing tonight.

EVELYN and WILLIAM give each other a look.

RACHEL: Oh my god. He’s proposing tonight?

A knock.

EVELYN: That must be Rylie!

RACHEL: But—

EVELYN: We’ll talk about this later, dear.

EVELYN opens the front door. ENTER Rylie. RYLIE holds a bouquet of flowers.

EVELYN: Rylie, darling! How was work today? *(She embraces him.)*

RYLIE: Good, good!

WILLIAM: How's J.P. Morgan treating you son?

RYLIE: It's great and all, but I don't see nearly enough of this girl every day. *(He hands the flowers to RACHEL, who awkwardly accepts. RYLIE puts his arm around her, and RACHEL is clearly uncomfortable.)*

RACHEL: Rylie, you're early!

RYLIE: Just wanted to make sure we could get to Mastro's on time, babe.

RACHEL: It's five, why wouldn't we be on time?

RYLIE: Well, it's going to be at least a twenty-five minute drive and women run on, well, "women time."

WILLIAM: Amen.

EVELYN: William!

RACHEL: Name a time I've ever been late.

RYLIE: Well, you're never late with me because I allot time for your anxiety.

RACHEL: My anxiety?!

RYLIE: Well, you know how you can be.

RACHEL: No, how can I be Rylie?

RYLIE: Didn't mean it like that, babe. *(RYLIE kisses RACHEL on the forehead.)* But I have something really fun planned for tonight after dinner.

RACHEL: Oh? *(She gags.)*

RYLIE: You feeling okay, Rachel?

RACHEL: *(RACHEL breaks away and hands the flowers back to him.)* I'm—I'm not even ready. Maybe we should stay in tonight? We could order takeout?

RYLIE: You want to eat Chinese food out of a paper carton on our anniversary.

RACHEL: Well—

RYLIE: On our five year anniversary.

RACHEL: I just feel kind of sick and I don't really want to go out tonight.

EVELYN: Oh, she's going. Come with me dear, I have your dress in the guest room.

RACHEL: But—

EVELYN drags RACHEL out of the room.

WILLIAM: Women.

RYLIE: Do they not run on different schedules? Am *I* the crazy one here?

WILLIAM: They're something else for sure. But hey—happy wife, happy life.

RYLIE: Yeah. (*RYLIE sits at the table.*)

WILLIAM: Speaking of, is there anything you would like to ask me, Rylie?

RYLIE: Like what?

WILLIAM: Well I mean, you never officially asked, so I thought now would be appropriate considering the timing of it all.

RYLIE: I'm confused, Mr. Bloomberg.

WILLIAM: You're not going to ask me for my blessing?

RYLIE: Blessing of what?

WILLIAM: Blessing of what? What do you mean "blessing of what?" I'm talking about Rachel.

RYLIE: Oh...

WILLIAM: (*mockingly*) Oh...

RYLIE: I thought that was kind of old fashioned?

WILLIAM: It's old fashioned to ask a father if he is ready to give his only daughter away?

RYLIE: Well, Rachel is the one who thinks it's antiquated, sir.

WILLIAM: When did she tell you this?

RYLIE: I don't know? Never? I just assumed that because she was into this feminist stuff that—

WILLIAM: And since when do you subscribe to any of that liberal bullshit? (*standing up*) Jesus, I thought you were different, kid. I thought you were like me! One of the boys!

RYLIE: I am one the boys, Mr. Bloomberg! I just thought—

WILLIAM: Shut up, kid. I can't believe you weren't going to ask me for my only daughter—my only *child*—in MY OWN HOUSE—

EVELYN enters.

EVELYN: William! Why are you yelling?

WILLIAM: He wasn't going to ask me for my blessing!

EVELYN: Well, Rachel thinks that's kind of old fashioned, dear.

RYLIE: See?!

RACHEL enters. She is wearing a dress now.

RACHEL: I don't feel good.

WILLIAM: Since when did tradition become "old fashioned"?

RYLIE: (*approaching RACHEL*) Do you need to go to the bathroom, babe?

RACHEL: Don't touch me.

EVELYN: Tradition? Oh now you wanna talk about tradition?

RYLIE: I was just trying to help.

WILLIAM: *(looking to RACHEL, who is in her head)* Don't bring this up right now.

RACHEL: I know, but I don't feel good and I don't need your cold hands all over me right now.

EVELYN: You are such a damn hypocrite!

RYLIE: I'm sorry, babe. Is there anything I can do to make you feel less anxious?

EVELYN and WILLIAM continue to ad lib their fight.

RACHEL: I'm not anxious! I'm not anxious. *(She starts to gag.)* I'm just... I'm just a little...

RACHEL runs out of the room. She throws up. Everyone falls silent. A moment of silence. RACHEL comes back on stage. She looks like a mess, but she tries to smooth down her hair.

RACHEL: Okay. I'm ready.

Act I, Scene III
Academic Office Room
September 2008

JAMES is seated at the desk. He is on the phone.

JAMES: Hi, Mr. Bloomberg? Yes. Yes. I, um, I've decided that I want to continue with the process. Yes, revisions are in the works... Would I be able to meet with you next week? Tonight? Tonight I'm doing some election campaign work for—alright, alright. I... guess I can do tonight. Yes. Thank you. Buh-bye. *(to himself)* Fuck.

The door swings open and RACHEL bursts in. She is crying.

RACHEL: Mom. Mom! I think I'm literally kill myself this time I can't fucking—oh. Hi. *(wiping her tears away)* Sorry. Um, do you know where my mom is?

JAMES: *(slowly)* In a meeting... Are you okay Rachel?

RACHEL: Yeah, I'm—I'm fine. I'll just come back here later.

JAMES: No, stay.

RACHEL: *(sniffing)* Okay. *(RACHEL sits in the chair across from the desk.)*

JAMES: We can workshop your senior seminar thesis some more if you'd like.

RACHEL: I'd rather not. I'm feeling kind of sick right now. Like, um, mentally. And physically I guess. I think I'm gonna... *(She gags.)* I don't think I can... RYLIE! *(She gags again.)* He— He asked me but I don't think I can... *(RACHEL breaks down crying again. She throws her head into her hands.)*

JAMES gets up and kneels next to her.

JAMES: *(in a soft voice)* Hey, hey. It's okay. Shh. You don't think you can what?

RACHEL: I don't think I can go through with—with *(gags)* RYLIE!

JAMES: Hey, who's Rylie? Your boyfriend?

RACHEL nods. JAMES tucks her hair behind her ear.

JAMES: What can't you do with him?

RACHEL: He's—he's always yelling and screaming and making fun of me for the things I like! And he makes me—makes me feel *(gags)* sick.

JAMES: I'm sorry. Do you need me to get a trash bag?

RACHEL: Like, like last week. I was telling him about my favorite verse and how I want it tattooed like, like on my body. And he said I was being ridiculous and that I would never get a tattoo because I have a fear of commitment. Which I don't. If I did I wouldn't have... *(gags)* I wouldn't have... *(She gags and presses her fingers to her temples.)* Uh, anyways he said I was acting childish and it turned into this fight so I ran off and uh, I got it tattooed anyway.

JAMES: What did you get?

RACHEL: The verse?

JAMES: Yeah.

RACHEL: Oh, it's kind of stupid. Now that I think about it...

JAMES: I highly doubt that. Can I see?

RACHEL: It's on my ribs.

JAMES: Oh, nevermind I'm sorry—

RACHEL: It's okay. Um, here. (*RACHEL lifts up one side of her shirt to show him the tattoo.*) It says "I dreamed that you bewitched me into bed And sung me moon-struck, kissed me quite insane. I think—"

JAMES: "I think I made you up inside my head." *Mad Girl's Love Song*. I love Sylvia Plath.

RACHEL: My dad always says I'm overdramatic like her. Guess that's why I always related so heavily.

JAMES: I don't think you're dramatic.

RACHEL: Really?

JAMES: Really. You just have a lot of emotions and that can be... a really beautiful thing.

JAMES and RACHEL make prolonged eye contact. RACHEL leans in and kisses JAMES. JAMES kisses her back for a second and then abruptly backs away.

RACHEL: I—

JAMES: What the fuck was that?

RACHEL gets up and walks toward JAMES.

RACHEL: I am so sorry I did not mean—

JAMES: Didn't mean to what? Kiss me? What the hell is wrong with you?

RACHEL: I thought you wanted me to!

JAMES: You thought I wanted to kiss my advisor's daughter? My mentee? That's—that's disgusting.

RACHEL: You think I'm disgusting?

JAMES: What? No! You're beautiful. No, no I just...

RACHEL: *(crying again)* I'm sorry I'm—

JAMES pulls her in by the waist and kisses RACHEL. They pause and look at each other. They start to unbutton their clothes. Blackout.

Act I, Scene IV

The Bloomberg's Penthouse

September 2008

JAMES and WILLIAM are sitting at the dining room table. WILLIAM is reading a manuscript.

JAMES: Do you think—

WILLIAM: Shut up.

JAMES: Gotcha.

A few more seconds of tense silence. WILLIAM closes the manuscript and sets it down on the table.

WILLIAM: You're almost there, kid.

JAMES: Thank you.

WILLIAM: But I'm not prepared to sign a deal until you reach a more finished draft. I want to see more of the family's financial struggle—and the child's crack addiction too. That was good.

RACHEL and RYLIE enter through the front door.

RACHEL: Well why can't they just print more money?

RYLIE: Baby, babe. It's called inflation. It hurts the economy.

RACHEL: Okay, so just deflate it.

RYLIE: You're so cute when you play dumb.

RACHEL: *(noticing JAMES over RYLIE's shoulder)* James?

RYLIE: It's Rylie, babe.

JAMES: Rachel?

WILLIAM: You two know each other?

RACHEL: *You two* know each other?

JAMES: *(to WILLIAM)* I, uh, I'm helping her with her senior seminar project.

WILLIAM: I've been meeting with James to discuss a possible publishing deal.

RACHEL: Oh, a publishing deal? James didn't tell me about any of this.

JAMES: Well, it's not all ironed out yet.

WILLIAM: He's very talented.

RACHEL: I agree he can really get in touch with his emotions!

RYLIE: So you're her tutor.

JAMES: I'm sorry, who are you?

RACHEL: This is Rylie. He's my... *(gags)* my... *(gags)*

EVELYN enters carrying plates and silverware.

EVELYN: If it isn't the lovely bride and groom to be! *(She kisses both of them on the forehead and begins to set the table.)*

RYLIE: Are you gonna be sick again, babe?

JAMES: You're engaged?

RACHEL: Sort of.

RYLIE: Sort of?!

RACHEL: Yes, yes I am engaged. Uh, we—we're engaged.

RYLIE: *Happily* engaged.

EVELYN: Young love! Oh I love love.

WILLIAM: (*sarcastically*) Yeah, they're just the cutest.

EVELYN: They've been together since—

RYLIE: (*glaring at JAMES*) Since high school.

JAMES: Since high school?

RACHEL: (*pained*) Since high school!

WILLIAM: Is there a problem here?

RYLIE: Yeah John is there a problem here?

JAMES: James.

RACHEL: No! No. No, you and James can get back to discussing that book deal that he'd chosen not to tell me about.

JAMES: Rach, I—

RYLIE: It's Rachel.

EVELYN: Rylie, dear can you please help me finish dinner? I've been using that new French onion recipe that you told me about.

WILLIAM: Yeah, go help out in the kitchen, Rylie. Since you're into all that feminist bull now.

RYLIE: I already said I'm sorry, Mr. Bloomberg.

EVELYN: You're coming too, William. James, will you please stay for dinner? I'd love to hear about how Rachel's seminar project is coming along.

RACHEL: Yeah, James, tell her about all the progress we're making!

JAMES: I actually have some campaign work to get to tonight.

WILLIAM: Campaign work?

JAMES: I've been doing some volunteer stuff for the election.

WILLIAM: It is so nice to see a young man like yourself involved in politics. I've actually personally donated to the McCain campaign fund since the nomination.

EVELYN: McCain-*Palin* fund, dear.

WILLIAM: Don't remind me. (*leans in toward James*) I say we keep the hormones out of the office.

RACHEL: Dad!

EVELYN: William! Kitchen. Now.

WILLIAM: (*standing up*) Fine. (*to James*) Tomorrow I can connect you with a few of my buddies from D.C. if you're interested.

JAMES: Appreciate it.

EVELYN, RYLIE, and WILLIAM exit to the kitchen.

RACHEL: You didn't strike me as a Republican, James.

JAMES: And you didn't strike me as engaged.

RACHEL: We both have our secrets, so what? I'm engaged and you're a Republican.

JAMES: I'm not a Republican. I'm a democratic socialist.

RACHEL: A socialist?!

JAMES: Democratic socialist.

RACHEL: I don't know what that means.

JAMES: Didn't expect you to.

RACHEL: Oh really? Do you want me to help you with your McBlaine campaign? (*RACHEL walks over to JAMES and starts touching his hair.*)

JAMES: McCain.

RACHEL: Whatever.

JAMES: Stop it. I don't support McCain.

RACHEL: Then who?

JAMES: (*quietly*) Obama.

RACHEL: Sorry?

JAMES: (*louder*) Obama.

RACHEL: Jesus, you really are a socialist.

JAMES: Please don't tell your dad that.

RACHEL: What? You're scared he's gonna take away your precious publishing deal?

JAMES: No.

RACHEL: Oh really? Is that the only reason you fucked me today? (*baby voice*) Cuz you wanna be fwiends wif my daddy?

JAMES: Keep your voice down!

RACHEL: Or what? (*loudly*) Hey mom! James and I fucked! In your office!

EVELYN: (*from offstage*) What, honey?

RACHEL: Nothing!

JAMES: *(stands up)* Are you fucking crazy?

RACHEL: *(grabbing his shirt collar)* Maybe.

JAMES: Are you really going to pull this shit right now?

RACHEL: Fine, be a dick about it, Karl Marx.

EVELYN enters the room with a plate of food.

EVELYN: Are you sure you can't stay for dinner James?

WILLIAM and RYLIE enter.

WILLIAM: Please, stay James.

JAMES: I'm sorry, I really have to go. McCain—um, calls.

RYLIE: Aw, we'll miss ya!

WILLIAM shakes JAMES's hand.

WILLIAM: Proud of you kid. Your generation needs more men like you. Men who embrace tradition. *(He shoots a glare at RYLIE.)*

JAMES: Um, thank you, sir. Thank you too, Dr. Bloomberg. Goodbye, Rachel. Rylie.

RACHEL: Bye James.

RYLIE: See ya!

JAMES exits. Everyone else sits at the table.

WILLIAM: What a patriot. Bet he would ask me for my blessing.

RYLIE: Mr. Bloomberg—

EVELYN: I think he is just lovely!

RACHEL: *(smiling to herself)* Yeah.

Act I, Scene V
Academic Office Room
November 2008

JAMES and RACHEL are putting their clothes back on. There is takeout Chinese food on the desk.

RACHEL: Do you wanna come over tomorrow night?

JAMES: To meet with you or your dad?

RACHEL: Me, silly.

JAMES: *(kisses her forehead)* Can't.

RACHEL: Why not?

JAMES: Volunteering at the polls.

RACHEL: Polls?

JAMES: Tomorrow's election day, Rachel.

RACHEL: Oh. Guess I forgot.

JAMES: Are you gonna vote?

RACHEL: I haven't really thought about it.

JAMES: Well, do you at least know where your polling station is? Rach?

RACHEL: Maybe?

JAMES: Have you ever voted? *(beat)* Are you even registered?

RACHEL: I don't—I don't know. I think Rylie is. He can vote for me.

JAMES: That's not how it works, Rach.

RACHEL: Politics is too confusing.

JAMES: Aren't you, like, a feminist?

RACHEL: Yes. Now stop attacking me.

JAMES: I'm not attacking you.

RACHEL: Sure feels like it!

JAMES: You're doing it again.

RACHEL: Doing what?

JAMES: Being dramatic.

RACHEL: You think I'm dramatic? You told me you didn't think I was dramatic. *(tearing up)*
I'm just... I'm just really stressed out right now. I have a lot on my plate.

JAMES: Hey, hey it's okay, Rach. I'm sorry. You're not dramatic. What's wrong?

RACHEL: I can't see myself marrying him.

JAMES: Rylie? Well, he's kind of an asshole so—

RACHEL: I'm serious, James!

JAMES: Why don't you call things off with him?

RACHEL: I can't!

JAMES: But why?

RACHEL: Because I can't. Why do you care so much?

JAMES: Okay so I'm not allowed to care about you?

RACHEL: No. No. Not like that.

JAMES: Jesus. Fine.

RACHEL: Me and you are a temporary, casual thing.

JAMES: Oh really? Temporary?

RACHEL: Yeah.

JAMES: Then why have you been meeting me in here every night for the last nine weeks? Why do you sneak me into your place when no one is home? Why do you stutter when you're around me?

RACHEL: Because—because—

JAMES: Because you like this!

RACHEL: Okay, and?

JAMES: And *I* like this too. Am I not allowed to enjoy it? The adventure of it all? Well, I *am* gonna enjoy it. To enjoy you. Okay? *(beat)* Which is why I got you this. *(He pulls out a book from inside the desk and hands it to her.)*

RACHEL: *Crossing the Water?*

JAMES: It's my favorite Sylvia collection.

RACHEL: *(reading the back of the book)* "The spirit of blackness is in us, it is in the fishes." Aw. Thank you.

JAMES: I don't know how we're gonna finish all this food.

RACHEL: Hey, I'm sorry. I got excited. Rylie never wants to eat Chinese with me.

JAMES: Shocker.

RACHEL: It's actually all I ate the summer after high school.

JAMES: Really? A millionaire's daughter and your meal of choice is watercress and shrimp dumplings?

RACHEL: Those other girls from Brearly were like, backpacking across Europe or volunteering in Africa or something... but me... I was too scared to leave the house for those three months after graduating and, well, Noodle Village delivers. I ate a lot of, um, pork noodle soup.

JAMES: Well, I'm glad that you don't seem too scared to come and see me.

RACHEL: Well that's because I feel safe here.

JAMES hugs RACHEL and rests his chin on her head.

JAMES: Me too, me too.

Act I, Scene VI

The Bloomberg's Penthouse

November 2008

RACHEL and RYLIE are sitting at the dining room table. RACHEL is reading the book that JAMES gave her. RYLIE is writing on a piece of paper.

RYLIE: Okay so I have my parents, your parents, my grandma, Josh from work... What's the name of that nice lady from St. Paul? The one who says we remind her of Jack and Rose? Rachel? Hello, Rachel?

RACHEL: Oh, sorry. What?

RYLIE: The name of the church lady.

RACHEL: What?

RYLIE: Rachel, I don't know where your mind has been lately.

RACHEL: What's that supposed to mean?

RYLIE: C'mon Rachel, we have to start planning these wedding things.

RACHEL: Ugh. I wish we could skip straight to the honeymoon.

RYLIE: Me, you, the Eiffel tower, and all the crepes you can eat. You can finally put that useless French minor to work—

RACHEL: Well I wouldn't say it's useless—

RYLIE: I've never even heard you speak it.

RACHEL: Can't all this boring stuff just wait until after Thanksgiving? Or maybe till after Christmas? I—I wanna enjoy the holidays with you. With no family drama or dress fittings or relationship stress. (*RACHEL gets up and throws her hands around his neck.*)

RYLIE: Fine.

RACHEL: Thank you, Ry.

RYLIE: What are you reading?

RACHEL: Oh, it's—it's just a book for my seminar project.

RYLIE: So this is what's kept you up so late?

RACHEL: Yep.

RYLIE: Is it from James?

RACHEL: Maybe.

RYLIE: Rachel.

RACHEL: Okay, it is from James, but I don't get why that matters.

RYLIE: He's weird, that's why it matters.

RACHEL: He's not weird, he just isn't stuck up like everyone else here.

RYLIE: Is it stuck up of me to want what's best for you? Babe, listen to me. He isn't one of us. He's a social climber, plain and simple. And I'm not gonna let this creepy friendship he has with you ruin our reputation.

RACHEL: *Our* reputation?

RYLIE: Yes, *our* reputation, Rachel. Our reputation. Because if you haven't noticed yet, that ring on your finger means that we work as a team now. *(beat)* Where's your ring? *(beat)* Rachel, WHERE IS YOUR RING?

RACHEL: Jesus, calm down. It's in my room.

RYLIE: Why aren't you wearing it?

JAMES and WILLIAM enter.

RACHEL: I... I didn't want it to catch on my sweater.

RYLIE: Oh really? *(RYLIE looks over at JAMES.)* He isn't the reason why you won't wear it?

RACHEL: You're being ridiculous.

RYLIE: Am I?

WILLIAM: What's going on here?

RYLIE: Nothing. I was just leaving. *(RYLIE storms out.)*

WILLIAM: Thank god.

JAMES: Are you okay, Rach?

RACHEL: Yeah, yeah. Rylie's just... being Rylie.

WILLIAM: So moody, that boy.

RACHEL: Tell me about it.

WILLIAM: James, can you go get your manuscript out of my office? I have a few notes.

JAMES: Yes, Mr. Bloomberg.

JAMES exits.

RACHEL: You think you're gonna go through with his work?

WILLIAM: Oh, I know I am. Just haven't made the big announcement to him yet.

RACHEL: Really? That's—that's amazing. When are you going to tell him?

WILLIAM: Thanksgiving.

RACHEL: When are you going to see him on Thanksgiving?

WILLIAM: Your mom didn't tell you? He's eating with us this year. Before we go to grandma's.

RACHEL: Oh. That's... great.

WILLIAM: I can feel this one's gonna be a bestseller. Might even get a film adaptation if we're lucky. He's going to get everything he's ever wanted and more.

RACHEL: Yeah...

Act I, Scene VII
Academic Office Room
November 2008

*JAMES sits leisurely at the desk, reading a book. There is a stack of papers on his desk.
RACHEL enters the room with a backpack slung over one of her shoulders.*

RACHEL: Hey... uh... are you busy? *(She sets down her backpack and James looks up from his book.)*

JAMES: Rachel! Hi. Did you end up reading the book?

RACHEL: Yeah! Yeah. Sylvia Plath is so tortured I just...love it. I'm not here for project advice or anything but—

JAMES: I mean are you ever here for the project?

RACHEL: Shh! There's people out there.

JAMES: Then I guess we'll have to be all the quieter.

RACHEL: Not now, James.

JAMES: Did your father have anything to say about my novel? Is he going to publish it?

RACHEL: (*apprehensively*) What's this? A Dickinson piece? (*She grabs a paper off the top of the stack and sits down on the desk.*) Cool. "Childish Griefs." Yikes. You know I actually read some of her stuff in high school. The "hope is a bird" one. I think? It was kind of bad. Yeah. Neat stuff. (*beat*) I actually came to say we need to talk.

JAMES: About wh—

RACHEL: No, I, I need to talk. And please promise you won't be mad at me.

JAMES: I promise I won't be mad at you, Rachel.

RACHEL: I didn't know what I was getting into with this. I'm so grateful for you helping me with this project. You know so much about poetry but like, that's also my thing I—I should know about poetry—and this—this thing between us is so fun. But it isn't a part of the plan.

JAMES: Plan? What plan?

RACHEL: All this time I've had a plan for how my life would play out. And I liked it that way. The plan was always Brearly and then gap year and then Columbia and then grad school and then Paris! I wanted to go to Paris!

JAMES: You can still go to Paris, Rach.

RACHEL: And the plan was also for my parents to love each other forever and come to my wedding! My wedding. God, I'm gonna be sick. And they were gonna love me forever, too, but I know they hate each other so much and they just want me to leave home because they think it might save their marriage or whatever—

JAMES: Rachel, slow down.

RACHEL: I can't! Everything feels different now. Everything's moving so fast. I'm supposed to get married!

JAMES: Don't tell me—

RACHEL: To Riley! I have to get married to him eventually. It's just part of the, the scheme of things. Doing this with you was never supposed to happen. I think my brain just freaked out after he proposed to me and I—I spiraled.

JAMES: You told me you would never marry him.

RACHEL: I didn't say never.

JAMES: You've been together five years and you said you "can't see it happening." So what are you two doing? Just enjoying each other's company?

RACHEL: I, like, I just regret this.

JAMES: You regret hooking up with me? Or having feelings for me?

RACHEL: I do not have feelings for you.

JAMES: Yeah right.

RACHEL: I don't! I love Riley. I'm gonna marry Riley. I think...

JAMES: Rachel—

RACHEL: I should have never kissed you! It was stupid. It was a stupid mistake. And yes you're hot and tall and smart and mature but—

JAMES: But what?

RACHEL: But you're like an actual adult!

JAMES: We're both adults, Rachel.

RACHEL: I haven't aged past fifteen!

JAMES: You're twenty-one.

RACHEL: Okay? Like, physically I'm twenty-one, but mentally I'm still in high school. I still sleep with a teddy bear—I mean, I mean you saw it when you came over that one time but—I know you're only like 26—

JAMES: Twenty-seven.

RACHEL: Jesus. You make me feel like I'm gonna throw up. My chest gets hot and pink and itchy and I think I'm gonna die. It's so fucking weird. It's weird seeing you in private because all I can do is picture you in here at school and it's weird seeing you at my house with my dad because all I can do is picture you, you know, uh, vulnerable.

JAMES: I don't get how that makes this weird.

RACHEL: I feel gross and sick and sweaty when I think about you. No offense. *(RACHEL looks down at her backpack.)* Oh, and I wanted to give this back. *(RACHEL pulls out the book and slides it over to JAMES.)* I'm flattered that you thought of me—

JAMES: I see a lot of Sylvia in your work. *(James slides the book back to RACHEL.)* Keep it.

RACHEL: What?

JAMES: The book, keep it. I bought it for you.

RACHEL: But I'm breaking things off with you.

JAMES: I'm aware.

RACHEL: You're not gonna fight for me?

JAMES: Fight for you? I mean shit, Rachel—I'm not a knight in fucking armor. I don't know what you want from me! One day you're sneaking me into your home and the next you say you're going to go marry that fuck Riley. I bought you the book because you like Sylvia Plath and I like you. And you ending this isn't going to change that so—so just keep it.

RACHEL: Aw.

JAMES: Huh?

RACHEL: You said you liked me.

JAMES: Jesus, Rach. Of course I like you. But clearly you don't feel the same way.

RACHEL: Says who?

JAMES: Says who?

RACHEL: *You're* the one who agreed this was no strings attached.

JAMES: You know what? I think you like this.

RACHEL: Like what?

JAMES: The drama.

RACHEL: I do not!

JAMES: *I* make your life interesting.

RACHEL: My life was interesting before you came along thank you very much.

JAMES: Bullshit. You have lived in the same place your whole life abiding by these made-up rules that you've set for yourself. You have no legitimate struggles and you're oblivious to the rest of the world's suffering. You live in Manhattan. On 57th Street! And you finally get a taste of the real world and now you're treating like—like it's some sort of fucking soap opera!

RACHEL: Are you saying this shit because I didn't vote for Obama?

JAMES: Christ.

RACHEL: Because I totally would've voted for him. I know you're like, an anarchist, or whatever.

JAMES: Jesus fucking Christ it's not about Obama. You didn't even vote, Rachel!

RACHEL: Okay? And?

JAMES: You can't even make a decision for yourself! You're the most passive person I've ever met. You can't decide if you want me, or if you want Riley, you can't even decide who you want to be the president!

RACHEL: None of that shit matters!

JAMES: To you.

RACHEL: What?

JAMES: *To you!* To you it doesn't matter because you'll never have to worry about politics, or anything. EVER! Not everyone is like you Rachel. Not everyone has daddy's money to lean back on.

RACHEL: Says the white man. Aren't you guys supposed to be the alphas of society or something? Because you're kind of acting like a bitch right now.

JAMES: Did you even take your meds today?

RACHEL: Fuck you.

JAMES: Did you? Did you take them at all this week? Are they in your backpack?

RACHEL: Wouldn't you like to know!

James picks up her backpack and starts shuffling through it. He pulls out a thick stack of papers. Rachel leaps to grab her backpack.

RACHEL: Don't!

JAMES: This is my manuscript.

RACHEL: Yeah.

JAMES: Why is my manuscript in your backpack?

Rachel forcefully grabs the manuscript from JAMES.

RACHEL: My dad wanted me to give it back to you. He wants to publish it. Was gonna tell you on Thanksgiving.

JAMES: Oh.

RACHEL: Yeah. Says you're a real talent.

JAMES: Hey I'm sorry, Rachel.

RACHEL: Shut up.

JAMES: I shouldn't have said those things.

RACHEL: Ya think?

JAMES: I didn't mean any of it.

RACHEL: Do you really think I shouldn't marry Riley?

JAMES: No.

RACHEL: No as in "no, you shouldn't marry him" or no as in "no, you should marry him?"

JAMES: I don't know.

Rachel starts to get emotional. James goes to comfort her.

RACHEL: I just don't want to have wasted these last five years with someone who isn't the one. It's—it's embarrassing.

JAMES: Do you even want to marry him?

RACHEL: *(crying)* Yes. Um, maybe? I don't know anymore. I don't know anything anymore.

JAMES: Hey, you have a full life ahead of you.

RACHEL: Yeah, a fucking boring one.

JAMES: That's not true.

RACHEL: You said it yourself. I create my own drama. My life is so excruciatingly mundane and there's nothing I can do about it. But then I met you, and I thought I was finally going to have my own adventure for once. You were right, James. *You* make my life interesting. *(beat)* And I know why you put up with me. I know. It's because—

JAMES: I—

RACHEL: It's because my dad's gonna publish your book and you're gonna be all rich and famous and have all these pretentious pricks breathing down your neck. And then you're gonna travel the world and experience dangerous and exciting things and I'm gonna be stuck here because I'm too anxious to leave my own room. I'm never going to get to experience that and I'm never going to be able to fucking escape from you.

JAMES: I'll give you space.

RACHEL: But you can't! You're always at my house and you go here and these are the only two places I ever leave the house for and I'm never gonna be able to get rid of you!

JAMES: I'm sorry.

RACHEL gets up to leave. JAMES stares at the floor.

JAMES: Rachel?

RACHEL: I'm not gonna tell my dad. You don't have to apologize again. He's gonna publish it either way. You're a great writer, James. Hope it was worth it.

RACHEL shoves the manuscript at him and storms out.

Act I, Scene VIII
The Bloomberg's Penthouse
November 2008

JAMES sits at the table reading a book. The table is set up for Thanksgiving dinner. RYLIE enters.

RYLIE: Oh, so you just get to hang out here whenever you want now?

JAMES: I'm sorry?

RYLIE: You don't think I see what you're doing?

JAMES: Reading?

RYLIE: I see the way you look at Rachel.

JAMES: Oh you mean my student mentee Rachel?

RYLIE: You're disgusting.

JAMES: I don't know what you're talking about.

RYLIE: I know things about you, James.

JAMES: Like what?

RYLIE: Like that you're a socialist.

JAMES: Big fucking deal.

RYLIE: You don't belong here!

JAMES: And where do I belong, Rylie?

RYLIE: You know where you belong.

JAMES: Oh yeah?

RYLIE: You belong back in your fucking shack in Queens and you know it!

EVELYN: *(from offstage)* James! Could you please help me with the turkey?

JAMES: Coming! *(to Rylie)* I'm flattered you know I'm from Queens, Rylie! Tell me, do you think about me at night?

RYLIE: This isn't over.

JAMES: *(exiting)* Looks like it!

RYLIE sits. RACHEL enters and sits next to RYLIE.

RACHEL: You okay, Ry?

RYLIE: I can't believe you invited your fucking tutor to Thanksgiving.

RACHEL: My mom did, and why do you care so much?

RYLIE: I don't like the way he looks at you.

RACHEL: What do you mean?

JAMES and EVELYN enter. EVELYN carries the turkey and sets it in the middle of the table.

EVELYN: William! Dinner!

RYLIE: He looks at you like you're his property or something.

EVELYN: WILLIAM!

RACHEL: And how do you see me, Rylie? Because everytime you look at me it's like you're looking at some sick, helpless child who can't do anything for herself.

WILLIAM: I'm coming, damnit!

RYLIE: Can you do anything for yourself, Rachel? Because it seems like I'm the only one of us who actually wants to get married.

JAMES sits next to RACHEL. EVELYN sits at one end of the table. WILLIAM enters and sits at the other.

JAMES: Everything alright here?

RYLIE: Shut up. *(to Rachel)* Tell me right now that you don't feel anything for him. Tell me.

RACHEL: I don't—that's not—

EVELYN: Okay everyone, let's all go around and say something we are thankful for. I'm thankful that James was able to join us this afternoon.

WILLIAM: Well I'm thankful for James's work in this election. I know that we didn't see the results that we were hoping for but—

RYLIE: Oh, he got the results he was hoping for.

WILLIAM: Shut up, Rylie.

RYLIE: Mr. Bloomberg, I respect you and this house so this must be said.

WILLIAM: Please—

RYLIE: James is a socialist!

WILLIAM: What? James, is this true?

RACHEL: Rylie, stop.

RYLIE: Yeah, he even volunteered for the Obama campaign. Are you really going to associate yourself with someone like that? I saw him—

RACHEL: James and I had sex.

WILLIAM: What?

EVELYN: Sweetie...

RACHEL: Multiple times.

RYLIE: I knew it! I fucking knew it!

RACHEL: *(to EVELYN)* In your office.

EVELYN: Oh my god.

RYLIE: Deplorables.

RACHEL: Don't act like you're not at fault here.

RYLIE: Yeah? How am I at fault when you wore the ring I bought you as you fucked him?

RACHEL: You were never the one, Rylie.

JAMES: Rach—

RYLIE: Shut the hell up!

RACHEL: Rylie, there is a part of me that is sorry. A small part of me that is truly, truly sorry. But I can't—I won't let you tell me how to live my life anymore. This mistake was all me. All my fault. The fucked up, anxiety ridden daughter—the FUCKING DISAPPOINTMENT OF THE FAMILY! It's me! I'm her! *(to WILLIAM)* Dad, don't listen to a word Rylie says. James is smart and so talented and you should still give him his book deal. He deserves it and he is NOT a socialist. I promise.

RYLIE: A book deal?! You were going to give this clown a book deal?

RACHEL: And I'm calling off the wedding.

RYLIE: You are *not*.

EVELYN: Sweetie, are you sure you want to—

RACHEL: I never even wanted to get married!

RYLIE: Well you made that pretty evident by cheating on me!

EVELYN: William is cheating on me, too.

RACHEL: What?

WILLIAM: Evelyn, not now.

RACHEL: Dad, is this true?

RYLIE: Guess the apple doesn't fall far from the tree!

EVELYN: And we are in the middle of a divorce.

RACHEL: Oh my god. (*gags*) Oh my god. Is this why you two wouldn't go to Paris with me?

RYLIE: Rachel, *we* were going to go to Paris! For the honeymoon!

WILLIAM: We didn't want to tell you until after you graduated because—

EVELYN: —because we know how anxious you get about these things—

RACHEL: “These things?!” How anxious I get about “these things?” I knew you guys hated each other but I thought—I thought maybe things would work out...

EVELYN: Honey, I'm sorry but—

WILLIAM: We sold the house.

RACHEL: No you didn't.

EVELYN: It's just not feasible for the two of us to live together anymore. We've been trying to sell it for months because we knew you'd eventually marry Rylie—

RACHEL: But I'm not marrying him anymore!

RYLIE: Babe, can we please think about this?

EVELYN: Sweetie, I don't know what to say...

WILLIAM: We love you very much.

RACHEL: I don't feel good. (*Gags*)

RYLIE: Rachel, let me take you to the bathroom.

RACHEL: Get off of me!

JAMES: Rach, do you want to go get some fresh air?

RYLIE: Stay out of this, adulterer!

RACHEL: It's my fault.

RYLIE: No it isn't, Rachel. Now come to the—

RACHEL: I kissed him first. I kissed James and it's my fault. It's my fault that we're breaking up and it's my fault that parents hate each other...

EVELYN: We don't *hate* each other.

WILLIAM: Well—

EVELYN: William!

WILLIAM: I'm just trying to be honest with the girl.

RACHEL: I'm gonna be sick.

EVELYN: And were you honest with me about fucking your secretary?

JAMES: Rach, I can take you outside right now and—

WILLIAM: You make me do this shit!

RACHEL: Don't touch me. DON'T TOUCH ME!

JAMES: I'm sorry.

RYLIE: Deep breaths, Rachel.

RACHEL: If all of you don't stop talking right now I'M GONNA FUCKING HURL! (*Rachel tries to collect herself.*) Rylie, I'm sorry, but this wedding is not going to happen. Probably ever. And I know that you love me—I do! I know you love me in some weird, fuck up way, but that's not the way I wanna be loved, Rylie. Mom, dad. I'm sorry I made you hate each other and want to die everyday. I'm sorry that I'm clingy and annoying and never leave this place. And James. James. I am sorry for kissing you. It was a mistake.

JAMES: Rach—

RACHEL: No, it was. I hope that your book deal goes over well. I hope you make millions of dollars and are rich and famous just like you've always wanted to be. You made it, James. But I'm not going to be there to see it. I don't want to see it. Don't email, don't call, and DO NOT try to reach me. Ever.

JAMES: What are you talking about?

RACHEL: I'm a burden to all of you.

RYLIE: You're acting crazy, babe. Come sit down.

Rachel grabs her purse and jacket and begins to walk out the door.

RACHEL: (*crying*) I'm not coming back.

EVELYN: Rachel, stop being crass—get back in here.

RACHEL: I can't ever come back.

RYLIE: Rachel, sit down.

RACHEL: I ruined it all.

JAMES: Where are you going, Rach?

RACHEL: *(through tears)* To see Paris. *(RACHEL slams the door as she exits.)*

The end.