

STEALING SHAKESPEARE



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Norman Maine Publishing

STEALING SHAKESPEARE

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Norman Maine Publishing

P.O. Box 1400

Tallevast, FL 34270

**“I only wanted an ‘A’
without working for it.
I didn’t mean
to raise the dead.”**

—Will

STEALING SHAKESPEARE

Finalist, Writer's Digest Annual Writing Contest 2005

FARCE. Will, a regular Casanova-type, steals Shakespeare's sonnets and recites them as his own in order to woo unwitting coeds. All seems to be going well for Will until he decides to steal James Joyce's novel, *Ulysses*, and turn it in as his master's thesis since "It's like the middle part of the Bible, no one ever reads it, but everyone agrees it's pretty damn good." But to Will's dismay, he receives a "C." Infuriated, Will seeks out his English professor and demands that she give him an "A" — after all, he reasons, it is the greatest novel of the 20th century. While Will's professor is re-evaluating his thesis, the ghost of James Joyce begins haunting Will and is determined to avenge the crime by stealing Will's girlfriend. Quirky characters abound in this fresh, rollicking farce.

Performance Time: Approximately 60-75 minutes.

CHARACTERS

(4 M, 3 F, optional extras)

WILL: 20s, English graduate student; Casanova-type and master plagiarizer.

MAX: 20s, shy, nervous and scientific; the opposite of Will.

DARLENE: Early 20s, Will's girlfriend; a psychology major.

SOPHIE: 20s, wears glasses and hangs out in coffee shops; proud feminist.

MR. WHEELIN: Max's dad; his behavior, manner of dress and attitude have all dramatically changed since his divorce—he is exactly what Max would be if he tried to become Will; dresses the way he believes college kids dress, although it has been decades since he himself has been in college; speaks dryly, almost monotone, as if his soul has been sucked from him.

DR. CARO: Everything about her suggests that of a distinguished scholar; female.

JAMES JOYCE: Ghost of the famous Irish writer; cannot be seen or heard by any of the other characters except for Will.

EXTRAS (Optional): As audience at thesis reading.

SET

Apartment of Will and Max. It is a small, messy apartment suited to two graduate students. The furniture and decor is simple. There is a couch facing the audience, a coffee table, and a small table by the door. Books and magazines clutter the room, including a copy of *Ulysses* by James Joyce and the sonnets of Shakespeare. There is a door leading to the bedrooms and bathroom.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1: Apartment of Will and Max.

Scene 2: An hour later.

Scene 3: Moments later.

ACT II

Scene 1: After midnight.

Scene 2: The next evening.

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PROPS

Milkshake	Snacks including carrot sticks
Hamburger	T-shirt that reads "Feminist," for Max
Stack of mail	Sombrero, for Mr. Wheelin
Pen	White bed sheet
Postcard	Wine glasses
Vacuum	T-shirt that reads, "Dubliners Do It Better," for Darlene
Headphones	Flask
Suitcase	
Jenga game	
Thesis (thick bound book)	
Glass of water	
Podium	

SOUND EFFECTS

Doorbell

ACT I
SCENE 1

(AT RISE: Apartment of Will and Max. The Ghost of James Joyce sits on the couch reading "Ulysses," apparently pleased with his work. After a moment, Will and Darlene enter, kissing passionately. The Ghost of James Joyce looks annoyed and exits into the kitchen. Will looks up.)

DARLENE: What is it?

WILL: Nothing. I just thought I saw something. *(They fall against the closed door and continue kissing. Will tries to lead her to the couch and manages to get her close but cannot get her to sit down. Still kissing her.)* Why don't we sit on the couch, baby?

DARLENE: I don't know, Will.

WILL: What's not to know? It's a couch, people sit on them.

DARLENE: I just don't want to spoil things by going too fast. I've made that mistake before and I don't want to do it again.

WILL: Darlene, I understand. You don't think I have the same concerns?

DARLENE: You do?

WILL: *(Offended, kissing her harder.)* You think all I care about is sex?

DARLENE: *(Unsure.)* No, of course not.

WILL: Because I don't. I care about you and making you happy, and if that means making love to you several times a day then I'll make love to you several times a day. I would do anything to make you happy.

DARLENE: That's so sweet of you to say. *(He starts kissing her again and leads her to the couch. She pulls away after a moment.)* I had lots of fun at dinner tonight, Will. What a great idea

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combining horse jousting and eating. I've been wanting to go there for the longest time. Too bad our knight didn't win.
WILL: Devastating.

(He starts kissing her again, and again she pulls away.)

DARLENE: Will?

WILL: Yes?

DARLENE: You know that poem you wrote for me?

WILL: Of course I know it. I keep it right here. *(Points to his heart.)*

DARLENE: That's so sweet. I liked it a lot, and I wanted to ask if you really meant every word you wrote.

WILL: Of course I meant every word. I wrote it about you.

DARLENE: It was so beautiful. Would you mind telling it to me again?

WILL: *(Still kissing her.)* Of course, baby.

DARLENE: Well?

WILL: Now?

DARLENE: Yeah, I really like it.

WILL: Anything for you. Let's see. *(He takes her hand, remembers for a moment, and then recites Shakespeare's sonnet 18.)*

"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date;
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd,
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd:
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
Nor shall Death brag thou wand'rst in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,

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So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.”

DARLENE: (*Sighing.*) It’s so beautiful. I still can’t believe you wrote it for me.

WILL: It’s easy to write beautiful things when you have beautiful things to write about.

(*He begins to kiss her again.*)

DARLENE: I just had a great idea!

WILL: I guess I’m ready if you are. There’s no point waiting our whole lives.

DARLENE: You should publish your poem!

WILL: What?

DARLENE: I don’t know much about literature...

WILL: Now that’s not true.

DARLENE: But I’m sure it’s good enough to be published.

WILL: I don’t know.

DARLENE: Sure, you might have to cut a little, but who cares? I’m sure even Steven King has to cut from his books.

WILL: Steven King?

DARLENE: Oh, Will, will you publish it for me? Wouldn’t it be something if I could show everyone the poem you wrote for me? (*She picks up a book and opens it. The book happens to be the Sonnets of Shakespeare.*) “Look, here. Look at what my boyfriend did for me.” All the other girls will be so jealous when I show them.

(*Will takes the book from her.*)

WILL: That would be something, but I don’t know, baby.

DARLENE: It would make me happy. (*Moves closer.*) Very happy.

WILL: I just don’t know if I could do it.

DARLENE: You’re an English grad student, don’t you want to be published?

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WILL: Of course I want to be published, I need to be published, but this is just too personal. I wrote it for an audience of one. Besides, if it got out how beautiful you are, someone might steal you from me.

DARLENE: You're so silly. A classic type green personality.

WILL: Type green?

DARLENE: It's your primary personality color. I learned all about it in my psychology of the mind class.

WILL: Is there any other kind?

DARLENE: See, people can be divided into four different colors: Gold, blue, green, and orange. You're definitely green.

WILL: What does that mean?

DARLENE: It means you're very caring, philosophical, and entertaining.

WILL: Yeah? I always thought I had a green personality. So what are you?

DARLENE: I'm much too free and well-rounded to fit into one category, but that's just how my mother raised me. I just can't wait to become a psychologist and help people by telling them what color personalities they have. So many golds think they're blue, and greens, orange. A lot of people need help out there.

WILL: Sometimes I forget how smart and caring you are.

DARLENE: That's just the blue in me.

WILL: I'd love to see the pink. *(Begins to kiss her.)*

DARLENE: Naughty boy. You know we never talk. Let's talk about something stimulating.

WILL: We talk all the time. Besides, I'm stimulated enough.

DARLENE: My roommate Jenny and her boyfriend are always having interesting conversations about fossils and court cases and current events. Did you hear about the murder case in Iowa? The only witness the prosecution has is mute. She had to mime her entire testimony. The court stenographer was so furious that he rushed out of the courtroom cursing.

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WILL: (*Kissing her.*) Fascinating. Absolutely.

(*Darlene pushes him away.*)

DARLENE: All you ever want to do is make out.

WILL: That is not all I want to do!

DARLENE: Can we just have one conversation?

WILL: We talked over dinner.

DARLENE: No, we didn't. All you did was scream horrible things at our knight for losing.

WILL: Nothing he didn't deserve.

DARLENE: You made the kid next to us cry.

WILL: How could I have possibly known he was the knight's son?

DARLENE: It was just a show, Will.

WILL: He didn't even know how to swing a mace properly.

DARLENE: That's not the point.

WILL: Okay, I'm sorry. What do you want to talk about?

DARLENE: Well, for starters, have you gotten your grade on your thesis yet?

WILL: No, they should mail it any day now.

DARLENE: I still can't believe you wrote a 400-page novel in a week. I bet it's great.

WILL: It's not too bad.

DARLENE: You're so smart and mature, not like all these undergraduate guys who couldn't write a poem to save their lives. They're too busy trying to get into a girl's skirt.

WILL: I've always found pants more comfortable.

DARLENE: That's not what I meant, silly.

WILL: That reminds me of another poem I wrote for you.

DARLENE: Another one? Tell me, Will.

WILL: Okay, but I really want you to listen closely.

DARLENE: I listen to all of your poems closely.

WILL: But I worked especially hard on this one.

DARLENE: I'm so excited.

WILL: Let this one dance in your ear. Okay, here it goes.

(Remembers for a moment and then recites dramatically Robert Herrick's poem "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time.")

"Gather ye rose-buds while ye may,
Old time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles today,
Tomorrow will be dying.

The age is best which is the first,
When youth and blood are warmer;
But being spent, the worse, and worst
Times, still succeed the former.

Then be not coy, but use your time,
And while ye may, go marry;
For having lost but once your prime,
You may for ever tarry."

DARLENE: You are amazing.

(She kisses him, falling back onto the couch. After a moment, Max enters unnoticed and doesn't notice them on the couch either. He is drinking a milkshake, has a hamburger in his mouth and is holding what looks to be a month's worth of mail. It is a fine juggling act. He manages to put the milkshake on the table without dropping anything. Finally, Max and Will notice each other at the same time. Will tries to wave him away, and Max, not getting the hint, tries to wave back. Will waves and points angrily, and Max, finally getting the message but not knowing what to do, just stands very still. Will waves him away again while still kissing Darlene. At this point it is a juggling act at both ends. Max begins to walk away, still holding everything in his arms, and carefully exits the apartment. Will and Darlene continue to kiss. After a moment, Max again enters the apartment with his arms still full and a hamburger still in his mouth – he has forgotten his milkshake. He is carefully opening the door when he drops everything and the door slams shut, causing Darlene to sit up quickly.)

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MAX: Hi there...everyone on the couch.

DARLENE: *(Embarrassed.)* Hi, Max!

MAX: Sorry to disturb you by...coming home and all...to my apartment.

DARLENE: *(Gathering herself.)* Will was just reciting his new poem for me.

MAX: Don't tell me it was the "Gather ye rose-buds" one.

DARLENE: He told it to you?

WILL: Sometimes I have Max go over them, you know, to proofread before I let the lines touch your delicate ears. *(To Max.)* Isn't that right, old boy?

MAX: You should have heard some of them before I got to them, using tetrameter when clearly a simple pentameter would be much better suited.

(Pause.)

WILL: Anyway, Max just had to pick something up before leaving.

(Max looks around.)

MAX: That's right. I'm always forgetting my...pen. *(Picks up a pen from off the table.)*

WILL: You know how math students are, always figuring equations out.

MAX: I guess I'll be getting out of your way, seeing that I have my pen now.

(He doesn't move. Long awkward silence.)

DARLENE: Don't be silly. I was just going to leave anyway.

WILL: Don't leave, baby, Max can find somewhere to go.

DARLENE: I have homework to do. Besides, you'll see me tomorrow at your reading.

WILL: I want to see you now. Badly.

DARLENE: *(Kisses him.)* Now be good, and I'll see you tomorrow. Goodbye, Max.

MAX: Bye, Darlene.

(She starts to exit.)

WILL: Darlene!

DARLENE: Yes, Will?

WILL: *(Recites a stanza from John Donne's poem, "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning.")*

"Our two souls therefore, which are one,
Though I must go, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to airy thinness beat."

(She sighs and exits. Max just rolls his eyes and continues eating his hamburger. To Max, annoyed.) Did you not notice the sock on the door handle?

MAX: Of course I noticed the sock on the door handle. It's my sock. I was looking for it this morning. *(He pulls up his pants revealing that he is wearing two very different socks.)*

WILL: If you saw the sock, then why did you come in?

MAX: How was I supposed to know that putting my sock on the door handle means that you're with a girl?

WILL: It's the universal sign. And why did you have to come back in for your milkshake?

MAX: You know how much I like milkshakes.

WILL: Yes, but you're lactose intolerant. They make you sick.

MAX: *(Hurt.)* It's worth it.

WILL: Not for me. *(Pause.)* Oh, I'm sorry, sport. It's just that I thought it was finally going to happen tonight. I even took her to Medieval Times. How plebeian can one be?

MAX: Did your knight win?

WILL: No, we had the red one. He went down in the first round.

MAX: The red one is the worst.

WILL: Tell me about it. I just hate to think I memorized all those poems for nothing.

MAX: Only you could get away with passing Shakespeare as your own.

WILL: I used a couple others tonight. I've really expanded my arsenal.

MAX: Where do you find these girls?

WILL: The psychology department. You know what they say about psychology majors...

WILL/MAX: Cute girls with problems.

MAX: I don't know how you do it. I would never have the courage to lie like that to a girl just to get her into bed.

WILL: That's because you're a math major and spend all day dealing with facts. In English, all we do is lie. We lie about the books we read, the plays we've seen, how we feel about passages. Hell, I made up a theorist the other day in class and the guy next to me agreed that, "Yes, Kuzbansky's theories are definitely at work here." If you graduate with an English degree and can't get a girl into bed by lying, then you've failed. It's the only thing that makes up for not being employable.

MAX: I think I chose the wrong major.

WILL: Yes, but you'll make money.

MAX: True.

WILL: Look, all you need is a little confidence. You have a lot going for you. You're smart, funny, good-looking. Sure, you're neurotic as hell, but so are girls. You just have to relax and go for it.

MAX: I don't know what's wrong with me. Last time I was on a date all I could think about is if I could still love her even if she had hotdogs for hands and dogs followed us everywhere we went, nipping at her hands. I hate dogs.

WILL: That is definitely not normal.

MAX: I think she was upset I took her to a hotdog stand instead of somewhere nicer. And it's not my fault I forgot my wallet.

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WILL: You have to stop thinking so much and relax.

MAX: And the date before that was with the British girl.

WILL: You should have never told her you collect porcelain plates of the Queen.

MAX: It's true.

WILL: I know it's true; I ate dinner off of one.

MAX: You're not supposed to use them.

WILL: Just because something is true doesn't mean you should share it on a blind date.

MAX: Hey, that reminds me...did you hear about the Mississippi murder trial yet?

WILL: The one with the mute witness? I thought that was in Iowa.

MAX: It is. The Mississippi one is with the blind girl. The judge ruled today that her suspect lineup can be used as evidence.

WILL: What kind of world do we live in?

MAX: A crazy one.

WILL: Hey, do you think I have a good wink?

MAX: What?

WILL: What do you think of my wink?

MAX: I have no opinion of your wink.

WILL: Here, take a look.

MAX: I don't want you to wink at me.

WILL: I'm not going to wink at you, I just want you to take a look at my wink. *(Will winks at him.)* Well? What do you think?

MAX: A little creepy.

WILL: Yeah, that's what I thought, too. Damn, I have a creepy wink. Who would have thought it would be so hard to have a good wink?

(Max begins straightening up the apartment.)

MAX: You seem very concerned about this.

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WILL: It's a very big deal in my life at the moment. A good wink is a very powerful thing. When someone with a good wink winks at you, you feel special, like you're the only person in the room. Like there's a secret that no one else knows about. Guys with good winks make it in this world.

What are you doing?

MAX: I'm cleaning this place up.

WILL: I know, but why?

MAX: My dad is coming in the morning.

WILL: That's right, I forgot. How is old Mr. Wheelin doing these days?

MAX: Since the divorce, he's been acting like he's in college again.

WILL: That's great.

MAX: No, it isn't. It's horrible. All he's been talking about is coming to hang out with us, drinking beer, and meeting some girls.

WILL: What's so bad about that?

MAX: He's my dad.

WILL: Good point. Hey, did your mom ever get the Valentine's Day card I sent her?

MAX: Yes, and she thinks you're the sweetest thing ever. I really wish you'd stop corresponding with my mother, Will.

WILL: I just like to check up on her now and then. Don't be annoyed with me, old sport.

MAX: Whatever, Will. So are you nervous about reading your work tomorrow? I've never heard of anyone throwing themselves a reading for their own thesis...especially one that is 400 pages long.

WILL: I have always considered myself prolific; if not talented, at least prolific. Besides, I consider it more of a salon—a gathering of intelligent and discerning minds.

MAX: I thought Darlene was coming.

WILL: She is.

(Pause.)

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MAX: Well, don't be nervous. No one is expecting the great American novel.

WILL: Good, because it's Irish.

MAX: What are you talking about?

WILL: Know how I said that you have to lie to be an English major? Well think about it, Max, how long is my thesis?

MAX: Long, but you used Courier New.

WILL: And how long did it take me to write?

MAX: A little over a week.

WILL: That's what I'm talking about, sport. Do you think I could write a novel in a week? I'm mean, I'm good, but not that good.

MAX: What are you saying?

WILL: Just that I might have borrowed certain parts of the book from other authors.

MAX: You plagiarized?

WILL: Don't use that word. I said, "borrowed." I sampled, like in music.

MAX: Who did you sample from?

WILL: A little James Joyce.

MAX: You plagiarized from James Joyce?

WILL: I told you not to use that word.

MAX: Fine. You stole from James Joyce?

WILL: Well, yes. A little.

MAX: A little?

WILL: Okay, a lot.

MAX: A lot...like you copied five pages, or a lot like 25 pages?

WILL: I turned in *Ulysses*.

MAX: What?

WILL: I turned in *Ulysses*.

MAX: The book?

(Will picks up the copy of "Ulysses" off of the table and throws it to Max.)

WILL: I changed the title. And the names. I didn't use much of the middle, but yeah, I guess you could say I turned in *Ulysses*, the book.

MAX: You turned in the greatest book of the 20th century, maybe of all time, for your thesis?

WILL: Guess that means I have the best thesis of all time.

MAX: And you don't think anyone will notice that your thesis is *Ulysses*?

WILL: That's what I'm counting on.

MAX: You'll be kicked out of school. Your graduate career, your entire academic career, will be over. I'll have to find another roommate.

WILL: I really don't think they'll notice.

MAX: Do you have any idea how hard it is to find a good roommate?

WILL: A good one? No idea.

MAX: Well I'm going to have to find one because you'll be gone.

WILL: I'm not going anywhere. Only one person actually reads it, and what are the chances she's read *Ulysses*? Just look how long it is.

MAX: It's considered the best achievement in literature.

WILL: That's because no one has actually ever read it. It's like the middle part of the Bible, no one ever reads it but everyone agrees it's pretty damn good. Besides, Joyce stole it from Homer and no one even knows who Homer was.

MAX: You're insane.

WILL: Can you tell me one thing about the book besides that it's good?

MAX: Yeah, it's a classic and you turned it in.

WILL: I mean about the plot or characters.

MAX: No, but I'm a math major, not an English professor with a Ph.D.

WILL: You're getting very worked up about this. I really think I'll be fine.

MAX: I'm going to lose you.

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WILL: Pull yourself together, buddy.

MAX: How could you do such a thing? Didn't you think of me?

WILL: I admit it was a less-than-valiant thing to do, but I was down to little over a week, had nothing good and wasn't feeling very inspired. A blank page can be a very scary thing. Well, there was *Ulysses* on my shelf, spine still pristine, and I thought, what the hell?

MAX: Why *Ulysses*? Why not something more obscure?

WILL: I wanted an "A."

MAX: Then you should have done the work yourself. What did you change the title to?

WILL: "S. Grant."

(Pause.)

MAX: I don't believe you.

WILL: I dedicated it to you.

MAX: Oh great, bring my name into this.

WILL: I thought you would be happy. I finished and turned in my master's thesis, and I don't think you're even happy for me.

MAX: It wasn't your thesis. It would be like if I turned in "Einstein's Theory of Relativity."

WILL: You should really consider it, I bet no one has read that, either.

MAX: You're going to get busted. These aren't a couple of your undergraduate girls grading you.

WILL: Can't you just be happy and relax?

MAX: Happy?

WILL: Yes, happy.

MAX: For cheating?

WILL: I turned in the greatest novel of the 20th century and all you can do is burst into a diatribe about how it's not my work. Intelligence is only knowing how to lie well.

MAX: *(Obviously lying.)* Fine, I'm happy for you.

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WILL: Mean it?

MAX: Yes, I'm happy for you.

WILL: Give me a hug.

MAX: What?

WILL: Hug me. Show me that you're happy.

MAX: I don't want to hug you.

WILL: Then I don't believe you.

MAX: Fine. I'll hug you.

(They hug. Will picks him up and gives him a bear hug.)

WILL: I love you, Maximilian Wheelin.

MAX: I don't like this, Will. *(Will kisses him on the cheek.)* Oh, why did you have to go and do that?

WILL: Because you're the best roommate ever, Maximilian Wheelin.

MAX: Please don't call me that. *(Exits into the bathroom.)*

WILL: Where are you going?

MAX: *(Offstage.)* To wash my hands and face.

WILL: You're weird.

MAX: *(Offstage.)* Do you have any idea how many germs you just spread on me?

WILL: Probably a lot.

MAX: *(Offstage.)* Yes, a lot. And I don't even know where that mouth has been.

WILL: Nowhere tonight, thanks to you. But that's okay, Max Wheelin, I'd rather be here with you than making love to a beautiful, young woman. Max Wheelin, has anyone ever told you that your name sounds like a comic book hero's day name? Like Bruce Wayne or something. *(Singing.)* Max Wheelin, during the day he cleans and does math, but beware, for at night he spreads his wrath, Max Wheelin.

(Max enters.)

MAX: What is wrong with you?

WILL: Nothing, sport.

MAX: So when do you find out how you did on your, I mean, Joyce's thesis?

WILL: I should get something in the mail any day with a critique and a grade.

MAX: You get it in the mail?

(They both turn and look at the massive pile of mail on the ground, and then both start going through it, throwing letters and envelopes every which way.)

WILL: God, when was the last time you got the mail?

MAX: I don't know, a few weeks ago. What about you?

WILL: I've never gotten it. See anything from the university?

MAX: Power bill, phone bill, some junk mail, another power bill, postcard from Tina.

WILL: Who's Tina?

MAX: *(Reads the back of the postcard.)* "Dear Will, I miss you horribly. Keep me in your poetry." I should have been an English major.

WILL: *(Vaguely.)* Oh yeah, I remember her.

(They continue looking through the mail. Max holds up a letter.)

MAX: Here it is!

WILL: See, I bet I got an "A." If they had found out, they would have called me in for a meeting or something. I have to admit, you had me a little nervous, but I bet they didn't even read it.

MAX: *(Unconvinced.)* Open and read it.

WILL: How about you open it.

MAX: It's not mine.

WILL: Rock, paper, scissors.

MAX: Still a little nervous, huh? Fine. On three. *(They do rock, paper, scissors. Max does paper; Will scissors.)* You always win.

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WILL: That's because you always do paper.

MAX: Paper is safe. Not too aggressive but strong enough to beat rock.

WILL: Yeah, but you always do it.

MAX: You wouldn't think I would do it again. Who always does the same one?

WILL: You do.

MAX: That's my strategy.

WILL: Just open it.

MAX: Fine. *(He opens the letter and reads it.)*

WILL: Well?

MAX: I don't believe it.

WILL: What?

MAX: You didn't get caught.

WILL: I knew it!

MAX: You're not going to believe this.

WILL: What is it?

MAX: You got a "C."

(Blackout.)

SCENE 2

(AT RISE: Apartment of Will and Max, an hour later. The apartment is much cleaner in preparation for Mr. Wheelin's arrival. Max is vacuuming and wearing headphones. The doorbell rings. He cannot hear it. It rings again. Finally, Sophie just opens the door. She is carrying quite a few books. She looks around the apartment and sees Max.)

SOPHIE: Max! *(He doesn't hear.)* Max!

(Max still doesn't hear. She finally goes over and taps him on the back. He turns off the vacuum and takes off the headphones.)

MAX: Oh, Sophie, you scared me.

SOPHIE: Sorry.

MAX: It's fine, I wasn't expecting anyone to...just break into my house.

SOPHIE: What's with all the cleaning?

MAX: My dad is coming in the morning, and he's a bit of a clean freak.

SOPHIE: I brought you the books I was talking about. Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Mary Anne Radcliffe, and Gloria Steinem. That should get you started on your introduction to feminism.

(Max takes the books and sets them on the table.)

MAX: Wonderful, like I said, I'm really interested in the subject.

SOPHIE: That's so great to hear. It's important for you to realize you're part of the problem before you can make a change.

MAX: I'm just sorry I haven't read more.

SOPHIE: Speaking of sorry...is Will still having that reading tomorrow?

MAX: He's been planning it for weeks.

SOPHIE: I saw flyers all over the English department. Jesus, he must think he's written the next *Ulysses* or something.

MAX: What? Why did you say that?

SOPHIE: Say what? Jesus? Written? *Ulysses*?

MAX: No, it's just crazy that you said that because...well, Will's thesis is sort of similar to *Ulysses*.

SOPHIE: Yeah, like how?

MAX: It's really long.

SOPHIE: No kidding, I saw it when he turned it in. He made sure everyone saw it when he turned it in. He's such an ass.

MAX: I don't see why you two don't get along.

SOPHIE: Because he's a jerk.

MAX: He's not that bad.

SOPHIE: He's a misogynist pig who preys upon the impressionable female undergrads of our university.

MAX: Yeah, but I wouldn't call him a jerk.

SOPHIE: He lies to people for his own good.

MAX: He has always said than honesty is for the unimaginative.

SOPHIE: Honestly, I don't know how you live with him.

MAX: He's a good friend.

SOPHIE: Didn't he make you act like you were passed out drunk last month just so he could seduce some girl on the couch?

MAX: Yeah, but they were really quiet.

SOPHIE: You're too nice. What about the time you guys did rock, paper, scissors for the whole month's rent?

MAX: That was my fault, I always do paper.

SOPHIE: Don't you think he knows that? He was taking advantage of you.

MAX: (*Laughs at the idea.*) I'm telling you, one day I'll do rock, and he won't know what to do.

SOPHIE: Trust me, you can find someone better to live with than Will. Or better yet, get a place by yourself like me.

MAX: Can we not talk about Will for once? I get enough of that subject from him.

SOPHIE: It's just that he's such a jerk. I can't stand a nice guy like you having to live with him. He's the very impediment feminism has been struggling against for several decades, and you need to recognize that, Max.

MAX: Let's just talk about something else for once. You know, I've been writing poetry lately.

SOPHIE: That's odd.

MAX: Why?

SOPHIE: You just don't seem like the type of person to write poetry.

MAX: What does that mean?

SOPHIE: You're just more of a scientific type of guy.

MAX: Math and science can be very poetic. Quadratic equations, for example, can be very beautiful.

SOPHIE: How romantic.

MAX: I'm serious, the sciences can be very sexy. Just look at astronomy, all those large bodies moving around each other.

SOPHIE: *(Sarcastic.)* Stop, you're turning me on!

MAX: Never mind, I just thought you might be interested to hear some of my poetry.

SOPHIE: I'm sorry. I think it's great that you're writing poetry. I would love to hear something.

MAX: Good, because to tell you the truth, you were the inspiration behind it.

SOPHIE: I'm flattered.

MAX: I have it memorized. Here it goes. *(He takes her hand, remembers for a moment and then begins, trying to imitate Will.)*
 "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
 No! You are more lovely and more temperature:
 Rough winds do blow the rose buds,
 And summer vacation hath all too short a date—"

SOPHIE: What are you doing? That's not your poem.

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MAX: (*Nothing to do but lie.*) Sure it is.

SOPHIE: No it isn't. It's Shakespeare. And you didn't even say it right.

MAX: Shakespeare? Are you sure?

SOPHIE: (*Disgusted.*) Of course I'm sure. I'm about to receive my Masters in Literature and you're trying to seduce me by stealing Shakespeare? And so poorly?

MAX: No, I just thought...I was confused, our writing is so similar.

SOPHIE: Yours and Shakespeare's? You really need to stop living with Will. He is destroying your soul. (*He winks at her.*) Did you just wink at me?

MAX: I don't know...did you like it?

SOPHIE: No, it was creepy. When did you start winking?

MAX: There was something in my eye.

SOPHIE: I really think you winked at me.

MAX: It was nothing.

SOPHIE: It was gross. Please don't do it again. What has Will done to you?

MAX: Why do you keep bringing up Will?

SOPHIE: Because you're acting more and more like him. God, next you'll probably start calling me "old sport." I wish to God he'd read something besides *The Great Gatsby*.

MAX: That's crazy. You're crazy. Crazy girl.

SOPHIE: What? (*Pause.*) I don't see why you can't be yourself.

MAX: I am myself.

SOPHIE: Then why are you winking at me?

MAX: I wasn't winking; there was something in my eye. A bee or something.

SOPHIE: There was a bee in your eye?

MAX: I don't know what it was because I couldn't see. And I wasn't winking. I was fluttering my eyelids to get it out.

SOPHIE: The bee?

MAX: Yes.

SOPHIE: I see.

MAX: So just forget about it.

SOPHIE: Believe me, I have.

MAX: Good. *(Pause.)* You know, I was thinking that maybe next week we could go eat at Medieval Times. It's supposed to be great.

SOPHIE: I'm a vegetarian.

MAX: I'm sure they have vegetarian plates.

SOPHIE: Yeah, the chicken.

MAX: I thought it would be fun.

SOPHIE: Besides, isn't that where Will takes all of his out-of-state freshmen girls to impress them? How pathetic.

MAX: *(Disappointed.)* It was just an idea of something to do together.

SOPHIE: I'm sorry, Max, it's just that I don't want you to turn into something you're not.

MAX: And what am I not?

SOPHIE: You're not some sleazy guy who lies just to get girls into bed. You're not Will, and if I thought there was ever a chance you might turn into somebody even remotely like him, I don't think I would want to hang out with you anymore.

MAX: There's no way I could ever become like Will. It's not in my blood.

SOPHIE: Good, because you're a good guy, Max, and I really like you the way you are.

(He suddenly kisses her, and she doesn't refuse. They keep kissing, and after a moment, Max's Dad enters. He is carrying a suitcase.)

MR. WHEELIN: Oh, for God's sake, put a sock on the door!

MAX: Dad! *(Blackout.)*

SCENE 3

(AT RISE: Moments later. Max and Sophie are sitting on the couch with Mr. Wheelin between them. There is an awkward silence as the scene begins.)

MR. WHEELIN: I thought we could get some dinner. I'm so sick of eating at the 7-11. The manager told me to leave the store, but I was about to go anyway.

(Pause.)

MAX: You said you weren't coming until tomorrow.

MR. WHEELIN: It's so hard keeping track of the days now that I'm not working.

MAX: Not working?

MR. WHEELIN: I quit my job.

MAX: What?!

MR. WHEELIN: Ha! Just kidding. I got fired.

MAX: Fired?

SOPHIE: Maybe I should go.

MR. WHEELIN: No, stay. It's nice to have some female company.

MAX: Dad, please.

MR. WHEELIN: Did you know I was considering the priesthood before I met your mother? The things we deny God for.

MAX: Why did they fire you?

MR. WHEELIN: It was stupid, really. I took off all my clothes and cried under my desk. But if you saw how many Bloody Marys I had for breakfast, it would make a lot more sense. On the bright side: if I don't earn it, she can't burn it.

MAX: Are you doing okay, Dad?

MR. WHEELIN: Why do you ask?

MAX: You got fired for one. And your suitcase feels like there's nothing in it.

MR. WHEELIN: That's because it's empty. I forgot to pack.

MAX: You should have come sooner.

MR. WHEELIN: You know when things started going wrong in this country? When they gave women the right to vote. First thing those crazy broads did was pass prohibition.

SOPHIE: Excuse me?

MAX: *(Covering.)* Will is having a reading of his thesis tomorrow. I think it's going to be good.

SOPHIE: Did he just say "crazy broads?"

MR. WHEELIN: Do you have any *grass*, Son?

MAX: What? Dad!

MR. WHEELIN: So you don't? *(Stares at him a moment.)*
Never mind.

MAX: We should all go to Medieval Times while you're here. It's this place where you eat with your hands and watch people joust.

MR. WHEELIN: Can I joust your mother?

MAX: Dad! Stop it.

MR. WHEELIN: I'm sorry, Son, I know she's your mom and all.

MAX: You don't have to apologize, just please stop saying things about Mom.

MR. WHEELIN: I wasn't apologizing for what I said, I was apologizing that she's your mother.

MAX: Come on, Dad, you have to get over this at some point. Have you at least been going out and trying to meet people?

MR. WHEELIN: Why? Did your mother meet someone? Did she say something?

MAX: No, I just meant that it might be a good idea to get out and meet people once in awhile.

MR. WHEELIN: *(To Sophie.)* Have any girlfriends?

MAX: Dad!

SOPHIE: Maybe I should go after all.

MAX: No, please stay.

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MR. WHEELIN: Might as well let her go now because she'll just run away sooner or later, and you'll find yourself a big pile of divorced mess.

SOPHIE: I don't believe in marriage anyway, Mr. Wheelin. It's a subversive convention designed by men and justified under the guise of religion to keep women submissive and in the shackles of the patriarchal ideals men feel are being threatened.

MR. WHEELIN: Those shackles cost me a lot of money.

MAX: We should play Jenga! *[or insert the name of another game]*

MR. WHEELIN: It'll just fall like my marriage.

MAX: Come on, I love board games. Don't you love board games, Sophie?

SOPHIE: Yahtzee is okay.

MAX: Don't have it, but I've got Jenga. *(He exits into the hall to retrieve the game. While Max is in the hallway, Sophie and Mr. Wheelin sit in awkward silence as Mr. Wheelin eyes her up. Max enters, carrying Jenga.) Here we go, this will be great. (He begins to set it up on the coffee table.)*

SOPHIE: You really want to play this now?

MAX: Of course. Now the object is simple—not to make it fall. But sooner or later it has to fall. It's the perfect game, doom lingers with every move. Here, Dad, you go first. *(Mr. Wheelin looks suspiciously at first, but can't resist and makes the first move.)* Nice. Right from the middle. Safe but respectable. Sophie. *(She also makes a move.)* A little bit riskier. Well played. My turn.

(He makes a move and now the three are suddenly involved in a game of Jenga. Enter Will very upset and holding his thesis, a very large bound document.)

WILL: I don't believe these so-called intellectuals!

MAX: What happened?

(Will throws his thesis on the ground.)

WILL: Dr. Caro wouldn't even talk to me about it. She just kept saying how inappropriate it was that I showed up at her house.

MAX: You could have waited until morning and gone to her office.

WILL: This can't wait.

MAX: I still can't believe you got away with it.

SOPHIE: Away with what?

WILL: She did agree to come to the reading tomorrow night after I threatened to sleep on her grass. I'm sure once she hears me read my work, she'll change her mind about the grade. After all, it's a work that's meant to be heard.

SOPHIE: Oh God.

WILL: *(To Sophie.)* You're a poet. You wouldn't know good writing if Ernest Hemingway was reading it to you.

SOPHIE: Hemingway was a misogynist pig.

(Will suddenly notices Max's Dad.)

WILL: Mr. Wheelin, I didn't even notice you there. I'm sorry.

MR. WHEELIN: Sounds like The Man is keeping you down, Will.

WILL: I guess he is. Only in this case, The Man happens to be a woman.

MR. WHEELIN: I know how you feel, Will. I know how you feel.

SOPHIE: Who are you people?

WILL: I'm going to prove to her that my work is both stylistically and academically progressive, a unique and important voice, and that I deserve a better grade.

MAX: How can you push this any further? Just let it go and consider yourself lucky.

WILL: I'll push it as far as it goes.

MAX: You're lucky to even get a passing grade.

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WILL: How can you say that, Max?

SOPHIE: How can you be so upset? You only worked on it for a week while the rest of us spent more than a year.

WILL: The difference is talent.

SOPHIE: Please.

WILL: And it's a matter of principal.

SOPHIE: Exactly. We worked and you didn't.

(Will spots the feminist books on the table.)

WILL: What are these?

SOPHIE: Books. You read them.

WILL: Who is reading this garbage?

MAX: I am. Sophie brought them over for me. I'm becoming a feminist.

MR. WHEELIN: *(Sadly.)* My poor son.

WILL: *(To Sophie.)* Sickening, the way you go after the innocent.

SOPHIE: You should read them, Will. You might learn something about women.

WILL: Thank you, Sophie, for your opinion. Now leave and go write your neurotic woman poetry. Or better yet, go put your head in an oven.

SOPHIE: Typical chauvinistic Will, clinging to the belief that a woman's place is in the kitchen.

MR. WHEELIN: I used to have a woman in the kitchen. You better be careful, Will, or you'll be alone.

WILL: That's my point. I don't want her here.

(Sophie gets up and begins to exit.)

SOPHIE: Fine with me.

MAX: No, wait. She is my guest, Will, and she doesn't have to go. Besides, we are in the middle of a Jenga game, and I don't like to allow substitutions.

SOPHIE: No, I think I'd rather go than spend anymore time with your roommate.

WILL: No, it's fine. Stay. I am going to go get a drink. Mr. Wheelin, you look like you could use a drink. Want to join me?

MR. WHEELIN: I could wet my whistle.

MAX: Dad, you never used to drink.

MR. WHEELIN: And look at what it has done to me. A life of not drinking has ruined me.

WILL: *(To Max.)* You coming, old sport?

MAX: *(Caught between Will and Sophie and the game of Jenga.)* I don't know. What about the game?

WILL: Suit yourself. After you, Mr. Wheelin.

MR. WHEELIN: I wish I was in Mexico.

(They exit. Max stays behind unsure.)

SOPHIE: I don't believe you live with him.

MAX: I don't know if I should let Will take my dad out without some supervision.

SOPHIE: Then go.

MAX: Are you sure?

SOPHIE: Yes, go.

MAX: I'm sorry.

SOPHIE: It's fine. Go.

MAX: I'll call you later.

SOPHIE: I'll answer. *(Max exits calling after his dad, Sophie looks around the room, sees the discarded thesis, and picks it up. She sits on the couch and begins to read it. After a moment, the Ghost of James Joyce enters and stands behind her as lights begin to fade.)*
I don't believe it.

(Blackout. Intermission.)

[End of Freeview]