

Getting Ahead

by Meredith Yanchak

GETTING AHEAD

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GETTING AHEAD

This play is dedicated to Elijah Dang, and to all the students everywhere who are finding their way in a difficult world

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ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

GETTING AHEAD was originally produced as a remote radio drama in Spring 2020 at Westlake High School. The first live stage production was performed at Westlake High School in May 2022 with the following cast:

EDDIE DANIELS: L. Weinberg
RILEY JACOBSEN: S. Dahlberg
MADISON WARD: D. Boughton
BEVERLY: K. McBride
DOUG: K. Raygor
LEE: G. Caro
PHILIP: M. Lopez / H. Byrd
PJ: J. Nguyen
DEBORAH: C. Jefferson
SPENCER: C. Conklin
ATHENA: I. Zhang
DAVID: K. Raygor
LORELAI: M. Rahman
CALEB: I. Horne
MOLLY: A. Smith
JEREMY: A. Anselmo
PERRIN: E. Sanderson
KARA: J. St. Clair
JARED: J. Blumenthal
DEVIN: M. Clapsaddle
MS. LUCAS: N. Matta
MR. RANDALL: J. Hempfling

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Cast of Characters

EDDIE DANIELS, high school senior. New kid. First in the family to go to college.

RILEY JACOBSEN, high school senior. Debate team. Model UN. Swimming.

MADISON WARD, high school senior. Student Council. High ambition.

BEVERLY, Riley's mother.

DOUG, Riley's father.

LEE, Eddie's mother.

PHILIP, Eddie's stepfather.

PJ, Eddie's younger half-brother.

DEBORAH, Madison's mother.

SPENCER*, member of the debate team.

ATHENA, member of the debate team.

DAVID/DANIELLE*, member of the Student Council and band.

LORELAI, member of the Student Council.

CALEB/CALLIE*, theatre kid. Also an athlete.

MOLLY, theatre kid. Also super brainy about math.

MR. SHAFFORD*, Assistant Principal. Covers discipline and testing.

JEREMY, a brainiac and a rebel. Molly's twin brother.

PERRIN, the school's biggest gossip.

KARA, a friend of Perrin's.

JARED, a jock among jocks.

DEVIN, a friend of Jared's.

MS. LUCAS*, AP English teacher.

MR. RANDALL*, the school principal.

**These roles may be portrayed by actors of any gender. Feel free to change the names/pronouns/references to suit your production.*

Lines marked with / indicate an overlap of speech.

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SCENE 1

Lights rise on a rather empty stage. Three separate doors with EDDIE, RILEY, and MADISON are in three separate pools of light. The students are prepping for their day ahead.

EDDIE. Mom! Have you seen my / Spanish notebook?

BEVERLY. *(off)* You're going to be late!

RILEY. I don't have to be in so early this morning. No tutoring. / I've got time.

LEE. *(off)* Did you leave it in / the garage?

MADISON. Can you braid my hair? It's picture day / Yearbook.

DOUG. *(off)* Riley, you're blocking me in. / I have a meeting.

DEBORAH. *(off)* Seriously? The bus is going to be here / in ten minutes!

MADISON. I forgot! I'm sorry. / It won't take that long.

RILEY. Mom, can you move my car?

EDDIE. I didn't take it in there with me /last night. PJ!

BEVERLY. *(entering)* Keys? *(Riley tosses the keys to Beverly.)*

DEBORAH. *(entering)* If I hurry. I can't take you to school today.

MADISON. We've got time.

DEBORAH. Maybe you do. I have an interview / at 9.

PJ. *(entering)* What?

EDDIE. Did you take my Spanish notebook?

PJ. What would I want with your Spanish notebook?

EDDIE. C'mon. Stop messing with me.

PJ. I don't have it. / I swear. *(PJ exits.)*

DOUG. *(off)* Riley! In this century?

RILEY. Mom's moving it!

MADISON. You're wearing that to an interview?

DEBORAH. What's wrong with it?

MADISON. It's orange.* *(*Or whatever color is obnoxiously available.)*

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DEBORAH. What's wrong with orange?

DOUG. *(off)* I'll be home late after my conference call.

BEVERLY. *(off)* You can't take that call at home?

DOUG. *(off)* Don't wait up. **RILEY.** "Don't wait up."

EDDIE. How am I supposed to find anything around here? We're living out / of boxes!

MADISON. You can't wear orange to an interview. It lacks confidence.

DEBORAH. Says who?

MADISON. Careerbuilder.com

DEBORAH. You're insane. And you're also done. Get out of here.

MADISON. Seriously, change the / jacket.

LEE. *(entering with the notebook)* You left it in the kitchen. Stop shouting.

EDDIE. We're going to be late. Can we leave now? *(Eddie and Lee exit through their door, followed by Madison, who grabs her bag before leaving. Deborah examines her jacket in a mirror, then exits through the same door. There is silence for a moment, before Riley stands up and moves towards her own door. She looks around her empty room before exiting.)*

SCENE 2

Northwood Hills High School. Morning before the first bell. The library. SPENCER and ATHENA have notebooks out on the table in front of them. Other students are spread out around the library.

SPENCER. "Resolved: In the United States, colleges and universities ought not consider standardized tests in undergraduate admissions decisions."

ATHENA. Some? Or all?

SPENCER. It doesn't say.

ATHENA. Then it's a generic generalization.

SPENCER. What?

ATHENA. *(snaps her fingers)* Wake up, Spencer. What? Are you a novice now?

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SPENCER. No, no. I'm awake. Birds fly. Bees sting. Generic generalization. Yeah, yeah.

ATHENA. Where's Riley? She was supposed to meet us at 7:30.

SPENCER. (*checking his phone*) Nothing in the GroupMe.

ATHENA. (*checking her phone*) Did you check Slack?

RILEY. (*entering*) Sorry, guys. My dad was blocking me in. Had to play car this morning.

SPENCER. That's the worst.

ATHENA. Is that actually the worst, Spencer? I can think of a million other things that could be worse than that first-world problem at this very moment.

SPENCER. Athena -

ATHENA. No, really. "Oh, I'm sorry I'm late. My dad was blocking my Lexus in with his Tesla." That's really worse than a dictator causing you to need to flee your country?

RILEY. Athena. The drama is not appreciated at this particular hour of the day.

ATHENA. You're late.

RILEY. I know.

ATHENA. We have a tournament to prep for? Or perhaps you forgot.

SPENCER. God, Athena. Lay off.

ATHENA. She's been late for every practice for two weeks. I will not "lay off."

RILEY. She's right. I'm sorry. I'm just - I'm juggling a lot of things right now.

ATHENA. So are we.

RILEY. I'm overjoyed at your empathy. (*A phone text alert goes off. She silences it.*) Sorry.

ATHENA. Look. If you joined the debate team for empathy, you really missed the mark. (*Lights shift to Madison and a Student Council members, DAVID and LORELAI, at another table, similarly situated.*)

MADISON. But what I'm proposing is just to move the deadline up a week so we avoid any conflict with the band event.

DAVID. Many thanks.

MADISON. It wouldn't be so difficult to get the mural up and completed

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by November 1st.

LORELAI. You've got to be kidding, right?

DAVID. November 1st is a week before our marching band showcase.

LORELAI. No, David. November 1st? That's the deadline for college applications. I can't focus on a stupid --

MADISON. Wasn't this your idea, Lorelai?

LORELAI. What? Moving up this mural deadline?

MADISON. No. The **WHOLE MURAL CONCEPT**. You were the one who pitched it to Mr. Randall. You practically stalked him in the hall the other day to get this set up.

LORELAI. Hey, you stalked him with me.

DAVID. You stalked the principal?

LORELAI. Followed.

MADISON. Intensely.

LORELAI. Intensely followed.

MADISON. Not the point. The point is -

LORELAI. The point is I can't move this mural up to top priority. I have 20 schools that I'm applying to, and I have to get my essays done for all of them before November 1st. I can't paint a mural **AND** write the essays **AND** do my homework.

DAVID. That's a good point.

MADISON. Shut up, David. Whose side are you on?

DAVID. I'm not on any side! This is a circle. No sides.

MADISON. Lorelai, please believe me when I tell you that I feel you. I've got homework and essays and applications too. The only difference is -

LORELAI. Is that you need this committee on your college apps to get in and I don't? (*A moment of silence.*)

DAVID. Ooo. Ouch. (*Lights shift to Eddie and some theatre kids - CALEB and MOLLY - at another table, similarly situated.*)

EDDIE. (*putting his head on the table*) It's no use.

CALEB. C'mon man. You've got til sixth period.

EDDIE. Easy for you to say. You weren't up all night studying.

CALEB. No, but I did get up this morning at four to make it to football* practice, so... we're even? (**Or whatever sport makes sense in your cast.*)

MOLLY. Could we not have a contest about who slept the least? That's

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depressing.

EDDIE. What's the point of Spanish anyway?

MOLLY. You're kidding, right?

CALEB. "Es el segundo idioma más hablado en los Estados Unidos."

MOLLY. Caleb. Not helping.

CALEB. Sorry.

EDDIE. I'm not going to catch up. This credit recovery class is a joke. I sit and I click buttons on a screen all period, and nothing sticks. I get to the test and I freeze up.

CALEB. Look, Ed, my man. Let's spend, like, the next ten minutes on these verb tenses, and then take a break. Then Molly can work with you on your Algebra til the bell rings.

MOLLY. And then we can all run lines for off book day at lunch.

EDDIE. Oh dang. It's off book day.

CALEB. Yes, my dude. It is off book day.

EDDIE. I forgot. *(An announcement plays over the PA system as the day officially begins. Students start to pack up their work.)*

VOICE ON ANNOUNCEMENTS. Good morning, Northwood! We'd like to remind everyone this morning that you may be seeing some prospective students and their families touring our campus today. We're very proud of our high-achieving students here: Did you know that Northwood students average 1340 on the SAT and 30 on the ACT, both well above the national average? Northwood students also have the opportunity to take over 70 advanced or AP courses across various subject areas. Everyone, please make sure to give these prospective students a warm Northwood welcome! Have a great day!

SCENE 3

The bell rings to indicate that the day is about to begin. Groups of kids get up from the tables in the library and move through the halls towards their classes.

CALEB. The bell.

EDDIE. I have ears.

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MOLLY. No need to be so snippy.

EDDIE. I'm not snippy. Sorry.

CALEB. Look on the bright side. At least you've got that AP English essay turned in.

EDDIE. What?

MOLLY. You turned it in, right?

CALEB. The AP English essay?

EDDIE. Oh yeah. Last night. I'm in full panic mode. (*KARA and PERRIN approach.*)

KARA. Did you hear?

CALEB. Hear what?

PERRIN. It's MY news, Kara. I heard it first.

KARA. You're right. You're right.

PERRIN. I know I'm right.

MOLLY. I don't care who is right or who heard what first, Perrin.

CALEB. Ooo. Now who's snippy?

MOLLY. You know what? I don't care. Let's go. (*She moves to exit.*)

PERRIN. It's about Jeremy. (*Molly stops.*)

MOLLY. What?

PERRIN. See? I knew you'd care.

MOLLY. What about Jeremy?

PERRIN. We saw him heading towards the AP office.

KARA. He didn't look too happy.

PERRIN. C'mon, Kara. Mr. Thompson will freak out if we're late again. (*They exit, as Spencer, Athena, and Riley approach.*)

EDDIE. What was all that about?

MOLLY. It's nothing.

CALEB. Molly...

MOLLY. It's NOTHING, Caleb. Let's get to class. (*On their exit, Molly bumps into Athena.*)

ATHENA. Hey, watch it!

MOLLY. (*exiting*) Sorry.

ATHENA. God. What's with her?

CALEB. It's about Jeremy.

SPENCER. The weird kid?

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CALEB. He's her brother.

ATHENA. So?

CALEB. So stay out of her business, okay Athena? Eddie. Come on.
(Eddie and Caleb exit.)

ATHENA. Wait. The punk looking kid is Molly's BROTHER? She's so... smart.

SPENCER. So is he.

ATHENA. I know he's in AP English or whatever, but that's not an indicator.

SPENCER. No, seriously. He's been making bank on essays. You're so out of the loop.

ATHENA. Just because I've never needed to buy an essay off this kid does not make me "out of the loop." It makes me organized and disciplined.

SPENCER. *(laughing)* Oh, okay.

RILEY. What was Perrin saying happened to Jeremy?

SPENCER. She didn't. Just that he was headed towards the AP office. What about it?

RILEY. Oh. Nothing. Just curious. *(A warning bell rings for the next class.)*

SPENCER. I'll see you in a minute, Riley. I've got to stop by the counseling office and pick up a rec form before class.

ATHENA. And don't be late for after school practice again!

RILEY. Yeah, okay.

ATHENA. I mean it, Riley! *(Athena and Spencer exit. Riley plops down in a chair, setting out her laptop. She starts to type furiously, then stops and stares at the screen. She looks up, noticing Madison at another table, packing up her belongings. Riley shuts her laptop, grabs her things, and heads over to Madison.)*

RILEY. Hey.

MADISON. Uh, hi?

RILEY. You doing okay?

MADISON. Sure, yeah. Did you - did you need something?

RILEY. No, no. Just thought I'd say hi. You looked - stressed.

MADISON. Uh, well...that AP English essay is a beast. I'm not quite done yet. But I'm okay.

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RILEY. Yeah. The essay.

MADISON. You sure you didn't need something? It's just that -

RILEY. No. No. I - I'm fine.

MADISON. Okay, well... I'll see you in class?

RILEY. Yeah. *(Riley exits. Madison, clearly confused, gathers her things and follows.)*

SCENE 4

AP English class. As the students enter and take their seats, MS. LUCAS is fixated on an iPad or a laptop.

MS. LUCAS. *(to the class)* Essay day, people. You know the drill. Due at 4:30pm. On the dot. Any later than that, and I won't accept it.

RILEY. *(entering a bit late)* Ms. Lucas?

MS. LUCAS. Riley.

RILEY. I was wondering if there was a chance I could have an extension on the -

MS. LUCAS. Were you in class yesterday, Riley?

RILEY. Yes, ma'am.

MS. LUCAS. And the day before? Were you in class on Monday?

RILEY. Yes, ma'am.

MS. LUCAS. And last week. Were you absent last week?

RILEY. No, ma'am. I was here. Well, I was out once for a swim meet, I guess, but -

MS. LUCAS. The policy states that I'm expected to give you one full school day to make up for any absence, but NOT for co-curricular absences. Would you agree that is what swimming is?

RILEY. Ma'am?

MS. LUCAS. A co-curricular absence. It is a competitive sport, correct?

RILEY. Yes, ma'am.

MS. LUCAS. Then I'm afraid you're out of luck. The expectation is that you should be able to do the work on time with the rest of the class.

4:30pm is when it's due. Take your seat. *(Riley moves to the back of the room and sits.)* Alright. Everybody. Eyes up for one minute of your time.

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This essay has been on your radar since last month, and I have very little sympathy for anyone who doesn't manage to get it in on time, ESPECIALLY since I'm giving you the class period to write and polish. If you need some fresh eyes on it, I'm happy to look and ask questions before you submit. Questions? (*The class is silent.*) Good. Essays due at?

ALL STUDENTS. (*overlapping their response*) 4:30.

MS. LUCAS. This is a writing period. Phones off. (*The students begin writing/typing as the lights shift to another area of the stage. The following lines are overlapped as the scenes blur together. The lights reveal MR. STAFFORD, waiting in his office. JEREMY, dressed in whatever is the outcast-stereotype gear of the moment, enters.*)

MR. SHAFFORD. Mr. Hillard. Come in. Have a seat.

JEREMY. Why am I here? (*Jeremy pulls out the chair in front of him. He sits.*)

MR. SHAFFORD. It says here that you're enrolled in AP Statistics, AP Spanish, BioTech, AP US History, Beginning Guitar, and Creative Writing.

JEREMY. Sounds about right.

MR. SHAFFORD. Did I miss a class?

JEREMY. Maybe? You've got the schedule.

MR. SHAFFORD. What about AP English 3?

JEREMY. Yeah. I'm in that class.

MR. SHAFFORD. Do you like it?

JEREMY. Sure. It's alright.

MR. SHAFFORD. Are you doing well in that class?

JEREMY. You can see my grades. What are you asking me for? (*The lights shift back to Ms. Lucas's classroom. JARED and DEVIN sit near Molly, leaning over to keep their conversation quiet.*)

JARED. So. Molly.

MOLLY. Shut up, Jared.

JARED. What? I didn't even say anything.

DEVIN. We just wanted to know what you know.

CALEB. She doesn't know anything. Leave her alone, Devin.

DEVIN. Whoa, my man Caleb. Defending his girl.* (**Or "friend," or whatever suits your cast.*)

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MOLLY. I'm not his "girl."* (**Or cut this line.*) Mind your own business.

JARED. Alright, alright... it's just... we haven't seen Jeremy all day, and he was supposed to be helping my buddy and I out here.

CALEB. "My buddy and me."

JARED. What?

CALEB. No wonder you need help in this class. You don't even understand basic grammar.

MS. LUCAS. Is there a problem, gentlemen?

DEVIN. Nah, Ms. Lucas. We're all good.

MS. LUCAS. Then I suggest you get back to focusing on your own work. (*Ms. Lucas goes back to her laptop. The lights shift again to the AP office.*)

MR. SHAFFORD. I'm asking, Jeremy, because you seem to be doing extraordinarily well in Ms. Lucas's class.

JEREMY. That's why you called me in here? To congratulate me on my superior grades? Well, thanks. It's been fun.

MR. SHAFFORD. I suggest you sit back down, young man. We're not through here. (*The lights shift back to the classroom.*)

EDDIE. What was all of that about?

MOLLY. It's nothing. Just... leave me alone, Eddie. Don't you have math homework to do or something?

EDDIE. Fine. (*He scoots his chair back, dejected. Madison leans over.*)

MADISON. Do you need some help on that Algebra?

EDDIE. What?

MADISON. You look like you could use -

EDDIE. Pity?

MADISON. Oh wow. No. Um...

EDDIE. I'm kidding. It's been an off day. Sorry.

MADISON. I just heard Molly snap at you. Thought you could use a person. And I took Algebra II, like, eons ago. I could help.

EDDIE. Uh, sure... Madison, right? (*She nods.*) Sorry.

MADISON. Don't feel bad, Eddie. I don't know everyone's name in here either. They do the whole "get to know you" exercise in the first week of school and then we just jump in to Hemingway and the teachers forget all about that.

EDDIE. Right?

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MADISON. So, you need some help?

EDDIE. What about your essay?

MADISON. Oh, I'm almost done. Just got to proofread my last page and I'll turn it in at lunch. You're done too?

EDDIE. It's just about the only thing I actually managed to finish in the past week. I've been playing catch up since I got here.

MADISON. Where'd you move from?

EDDIE. Colorado. It's so different there. I mean, in my old school, I didn't need two years of Spanish, or whatever this history class is that I'm taking now...

MADISON. Yeah. Well. Northwood is weird all on its own. Let me see what you're working on in Algebra. Maybe I can make some sense out of it.

EDDIE. Thanks. (*Lights shift. AP Office.*)

MR. SHAFFORD. I got a report here.

JEREMY. Oh yeah?

MR. SHAFFORD. An anonymous tip.

JEREMY. What's that got to do with me?

MR. SHAFFORD. A student reported you for a student code of conduct violation.

JEREMY. And which part of this "code" did I allegedly violate?

MR. SHAFFORD. I don't appreciate your tone, Mr. Hillard.

JEREMY. And I don't appreciate being accused without proof, Mr. Shafford.

MR. SHAFFORD. Proof. Yes. We're getting to that. We take these tips seriously, and we investigate each one thoroughly. Especially when it comes to academic honor code.

JEREMY. Yeah?

MR. SHAFFORD. Yeah. (*Lights shift. The classroom.*)

MS. LUCAS. 30 minutes everyone. Remember the deadline: 4:30pm. Not a minute past that.

JARED. What about 27 seconds?

MS. LUCAS. Very funny, Jared. Back to work. (*Riley shifts over to Molly's workspace.*)

RILEY. Hey.

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MOLLY. Hi, Riley. You finished with that essay already?

RILEY. Well, no.

MOLLY. Then you should probably get back to work.

RILEY. Look, I know we're not... friends... or whatever, but -

MOLLY. What do you want?

RILEY. Where's Jeremy?

MOLLY. Just because he's my twin brother does not mean that I am expected to constantly keep tabs on him. What is with people today?

RILEY. It's just that, he was - um...

MOLLY. Let me guess. He was supposed to give you some "help" with the essay due today. Yeah. Well. It looks like your luck just ran out. (*Molly stands and crosses to Ms. Lucas's desk.*)

MOLLY. Ms. Lucas? I'm done. Mind if I go to the theatre room? We've got a show coming up and I'm could use some time to work on the costumes.

MS. LUCAS. You're sure it's okay with the director?

MOLLY. I'll have her email you, if you want.

MS. LUCAS. That would be great. (*Molly exits, letting the door slam behind her. The lights shift again.*)

MR. SHAFFORD. So, you can see why we need to take a look at your school issued iPad.

JEREMY. Fine. (*Jeremy reaches into his bag for his iPad. He lets it drop onto Shafford's desk. His wallet falls out of his bag, revealing a stack of bills.*)

MR. SHAFFORD. Wow. That's a lot of cash to be carrying.

JEREMY. It's a crime to carry cash now? (*Lights shift. Madison has her laptop out and is working with Eddie.*)

MADISON. And this site actually lets you check your work.

EDDIE. Dang. That's great. Thanks.

MADISON. No problem.

EDDIE. You're really into computers, huh?

MADISON. What do you mean?

EDDIE. I mean, you just went through, like, a hundred tutorial websites just about algebra with me in 10 minutes. How'd you find all this stuff? You're like a human database.

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MADISON. I dabble.

EDDIE. Anyway. Thanks. I owe you.

MADISON. No, you don't. I'm happy to help. This place can be overwhelming. It took me a while to get used to it too. (*Eddie moves off to work on his own. Jared and Devin scoot closer to Madison.*)

JARED. Hey Madison. What's going on?

MADISON. Jared. Devin.

DEVIN. Dude. You're, what? Like a computer genius or something, right?

MADISON. Hardly.

JARED. You are, man. It's true. Aren't you in AP everything?

MADISON. Not everything. But yeah. I'm in AP Stats. And this class. And AP Human. Why?

JARED. So, if you're so smart about computers, you could probably be a hacker.

DEVIN. Like, you could hack a whole system or whatever?

MADISON. I have no idea. Never tried. What are you talking to me for? Don't you have a sport to play or something?

JARED. Don't be a hater, Madison.

DEVIN. Harsh.

JARED. We were just thinking, since you're a hacker and all -

MADISON. I'm not a hacker.

JARED. You could probably help us out.

MADISON. With what?

DEVIN. (*whispering intently now*) Dude. With this essay. (*Lights shift. Mr. Shafford clicks away at the attached keyboard of the iPad.*)

JEREMY. What exactly do you think you're going to find?

MR. SHAFFORD. Well, your network drive folders are school property, technically, so I'm just taking a look to see what's in there.

JEREMY. My school work?

MR. SHAFFORD. Like I said, we take academic integrity very seriously. And the report that came in -

JEREMY. Yeah, about that report. What exactly was I accused of doing?

MR. SHAFFORD. Breaking the academic honor code.

JEREMY. Yeah, but what is that? What does that mean?

MR. SHAFFORD. It means cheating, Jeremy.

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JEREMY. Cheating?

MR. SHAFFORD. Yes.

JEREMY. I don't cheat.

MR. SHAFFORD. I didn't say you did. (*Lights shift.*)

MADISON. Absolutely not.

DEVIN. Come on, Madison. It's not like you're cheating. You'd just be helping us out.

JARED. And we'd pay you just like Jeremy was going to get paid.

DEVIN. Everyone can always use a few extra bucks, right?

MADISON. I said no.

JARED. It'd be easy for you.

DEVIN. Just find someone else's essay, print it out or, like, share it with us or something -

JARED. And we'd take care of everything else. No one would even have to know.

MADISON. First off, I'm not a hacker. Second, I already have a job so I don't need your money. Third, leave me alone.

DEVIN. Dude. Harsh.

JARED. You're making a mistake.

MADISON. Great. Go away. (*Riley scoots over as Jared and Devin leave.*)

RILEY. What was all that about?

MADISON. Those idiots want me to steal an essay for them.

RILEY. Wow.

MADISON. I can't believe they're even in this class. If they can't keep up, why'd they even take an AP class?

RILEY. I don't know. (*Riley's phone dings with an incoming message. She looks at it and sighs loudly, putting the phone away.*)

MADISON. You okay?

RILEY. Yeah. It's my mom. It's nothing. See you later. (*The bell rings. Lights shift.*)

MR. SHAFFORD. It looks like there are files here that have been shared multiple times.

JEREMY. Yeah, so what? It's Google Drive. Things get shared all the time in class.

GETTING AHEAD

MR. SHAFFORD. And this spreadsheet? This doesn't look too good on your part, Mr. Hillard.

JEREMY. And would you stop calling me that? Jeremy. My name is Jeremy. Do I need - listen, do I get to call someone?

MR. SHAFFORD. No need. I'll be doing that for you. Sit down, Mr. Hillard. You'll be here for a while.

SCENE 5

The cafeteria at lunch. Riley enters and is immediately stopped by Athena and Spencer.

ATHENA. So did you finish?

RILEY. What?

ATHENA. The debate prep you were supposed to have done this morning.

RILEY. Oh. Right.

SPENCER. Athena. Back off. It's only been a few hours.

ATHENA. Since when are you such a softie, Spencer?

RILEY. I'll get it done. Just - give me til the end of the day, okay? *(Riley walks off in a hurry while Athena calls after her.)*

ATHENA. 4:30! We'll see you at practice and you better be ready! *(Riley's phone alert goes off again. She looks at it and ignores it, putting it back in her pocket. David and Lorelai enter with Madison, looking for a place to sit.)*

DAVID. So I said, maybe we should hire someone new to do the drill charts for band in the fall. We just need to switch things up a bit.

LORELAI. And how'd that go over?

DAVID. I don't know. I think I'm getting to him.

LORELAI. Yeah, 'cause you're so annoying, David.

DAVID. Like you're any better. Stalker.

LORELAI. We didn't stalk him!

MADISON. Guys, I need 20 minutes.

LORELAI. What for?

MADISON. I just need to proofread this essay and turn it in.

DAVID. You didn't finish yet?

GETTING AHEAD

MADISON. No, I'm finished. I just need to look over it again before I'm sure.

LORELAI. Don't want to lose any points, huh?

MADISON. You know I can't afford that.

DAVID. I wish you two would just lay off each other for a day about this.

LORELAI. What? She's like, two hundredths of a point behind me. If she gets ahead, I'll be ranked fourth and she'll be third.

MADISON. It's not about that.

LORELAI. Yeah right.

DAVID. Twenty minutes?

MADISON. Twenty minutes. *(David and Lorelai move off, as Madison clicks away at her laptop again. Eddie, Molly, and Caleb enter with lunch trays, running lines.)*

EDDIE. "No, sir. Not even for ready money."

CALEB. "That will do, Lane. Thank you."

EDDIE. "Thank you, sir."

CALEB. "I am greatly distressed, Aunt Augusta, about there being no cucumbers, not even for ready money." *(An awkward pause.)*

EDDIE. Molly.

MOLLY. What?

EDDIE. It's your line.

MOLLY. Oh? Um. What was the cue?

CALEB. "... Not even for ready money."

MOLLY. "It really makes no matter, Algernon...." Wait. Line.

EDDIE. *(paging through a script)* Sorry. I wasn't looking.

MOLLY. Forget it. Can we do this later?

EDDIE. Off book day? Today? Perhaps you've heard of it?

CALEB. You okay?

MOLLY. No.

CALEB. You heard from Jeremy yet?

MOLLY. No. *(Kara and Perrin enter, gossiping. Molly catches a glimpse of them.)* Let's eat over here today.

CALEB. Oh. Sure. *(They begin to gather their things, but...)*

PERRIN. Hi, Molly.

EDDIE. Too late.

GETTING AHEAD

PERRIN. I heard that the campus techs were searching Jeremy's computer.

MOLLY. Great.

KARA. And Perrin said they called in Mr. Curtis.

PERRIN. Do you know who Mr. Curtis is?

MOLLY. No and I don't -

PERRIN. He's, like, the campus security officer.

KARA. Yeah, he, like, sits and watches security cameras all day.

CALEB. Look, don't you have other people you can bother today?

PERRIN. I just thought she'd like to know. Wow.

MOLLY. Yeah, well. I've got all sorts of information now, okay?

PERRIN. C'mon, Kara.

KARA. See ya. *(They walk off towards another group of students.)*

EDDIE. Wanna run lines now?

MOLLY. Yeah. Sounds great. *(Riley approaches Madison.)*

RILEY. Madison?

MADISON. Yeah?

RILEY. I don't want to interrupt you if you're working -

MADISON. No. I'm good. Just finished. *(She clicks a few buttons and turns her attention to Riley.)*

RILEY. I - I just wanted to say, I'm sorry for being so weird with you earlier.

MADISON. It's fine.

RILEY. I - I've got a lot going on, and my mom just won't stop texting today.

MADISON. Yeah. I get it.

RILEY. Is she this annoying at work, too?

MADISON. What?

RILEY. I mean, maybe you can't talk about it, huh? I just know you're in my mom's office for mentorship.

MADISON. Oh yeah. I know Beverly.

RILEY. "Beverly." Wow. I didn't know she was so casual.

MADISON. She can be. I only see her twice a week. And mostly I'm just alphabetizing and creating spreadsheets, so... I wouldn't know.

RILEY. Huh. Okay.

GETTING AHEAD

MADISON. I mean, she's nice! I like working there. It's a good experience, I guess. She said she'd write me a recommendation letter for college? What do you want me to say? This is weird.

RILEY. *(laughs that off)* Nothing. I just thought you might be someone that I could talk to about things, I guess.

MADISON. Oh?

RILEY. No big deal. *(Riley walks off. David and Lorelai approach.)*

DAVID. That was twenty minutes.

LORELAI. Was that Riley Jacobson?

MADISON. Yeah.

LORELAI. What was she talking to you for?

MADISON. We know each other. From class and stuff.

DAVID. Are you friends?

MADISON. I honestly have no earthly idea. *(Lights fade as the bell rings.)*

SCENE 6

Madison sits at a table in the research center, working at a laptop again. Students are milling about doing various tasks.

JARED. *(to Devin)* Ask her again.

DEVIN. No, you ask.

JARED. Seriously? What? Are you scared or something?

DEVIN. Dude. She's just going to turn us down again.

JARED. *(on the approach)* Madison.

MADISON. I said no, Jared. Go figure it out on your own.

DEVIN. *(to Jared)* See?

JARED. Man, you are cold.

MADISON. It's what gets me through the day, gentlemen. *(Jared and Devin take off. Madison continues to work, and finally reaches a stopping point. She shuts her laptop as Riley approaches.)*

MADISON. Riley? Aren't you in Debate this period?

RILEY. Yeah, well. I told my teammates that I'd have my prep finished by 4:30, so... it bought me some time in class to get away from them.

GETTING AHEAD

MADISON. I don't mean to sound weird or anything, but -- I've seen you more today than I've seen you all year.

RILEY. Yeah?

MADISON. That sounded weird.

RILEY. It did.

MADISON. We don't really have the same friend group. You're always with Athena and Spencer, and I'm usually dealing with Student Council stuff. But today. You're everywhere.

RILEY. We do have some classes together.

MADISON. Right, but when's the last time you talked to me in class?

RILEY. Um.

MADISON. Yeah. Eighth grade? Seventh?

RILEY. Probably. I guess.

MADISON. What is with you today?

RILEY. You really want to know?

MADISON. I guess? No. I don't know.

RILEY. Are we friends?

MADISON. Okay, THAT was weird.

RILEY. You work for my mother. We're in the same classes. We're in the same grade. Hell, we're in the top ten.

MADISON. That doesn't really equal friendship.

RILEY. Yeah. Well. Maybe it should.

MADISON. Okay, well. Yeah. Bye.

RILEY. No. Please don't go.

MADISON. No?

RILEY. I need your help.

MADISON. My help?

RILEY. Yes. It's why I've been so weird, I guess. I've been trying to solve a problem all day, and it didn't occur to me until English that you were the one who could help me. I've been trying to figure out how to ask -

MADISON. Okay. Go ahead.

RILEY. The essay.

MADISON. Yeah?

RILEY. I didn't do it.

MADISON. Riley!

GETTING AHEAD

RILEY. It's stupid, I know.

MADISON. Really stupid. That essay is worth twenty five percent of our grade.

RILEY. I know.

MADISON. What are you going to do?

RILEY. That's the thing I thought you could help with.

MADISON. I don't follow.

RILEY. My guess is that, by now, most of the people in our class have turned that essay in.

MADISON. Yeah...

RILEY. And you could get one of the essays for me.

MADISON. What?

RILEY. Oh come on, Madison. You and I both know that you could hack in to anyone's Drive folder.

MADISON. Riley -

RILEY. I know you can.

MADISON. So what?

RILEY. If you could get one for me, as friends, I would owe you. Big time.

MADISON. God, you're as bad as Jared. I don't believe it.

RILEY. What are you talking about?

MADISON. All day Jared and Devin have been on me to find them an essay because they were going to buy one off of Jeremy and now /... well - oh my God.

RILEY. They're terrible, aren't / they?

MADISON. You were going to buy one, too.

RILEY. No, really / I wasn't.

MADISON. You had a deal with Jeremy and when he got caught / you came to me.

RILEY. It wasn't a deal. I just needed help.

MADISON. Help? This isn't help. This is cheating.

RILEY. You need to help me.

MADISON. I don't NEED to do anything for you.

RILEY. We're friends.

MADISON. We are NOT friends. *(She packs up to leave.)*

GETTING AHEAD

RILEY. I'll tell my mom.

MADISON. What?

RILEY. I'll tell my mom not to write you that recommendation letter. I'll tell her... I don't know... I'll tell her something. Like you stole my idea for a project or something. She sucks, but she'll always listen to me about gossip. And you'll be out a college rec. Just like that.

MADISON. You wouldn't.

RILEY. Believe me. At this point, I would. What will it be? *(Madison and Riley have a brief stare down. Finally, Madison goes back to her laptop, unfolds it, and clacks away at the keyboard as the lights shift.)*

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