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CHARACTERS

ELEANOR, a rather ordinary high school student.

TAY, her best friend.

DAD, her dad, a little bit neurotic.

MOM, her mom, more than a little bit neurotic.

MISS WRIGHT, an English teacher.

PRINCIPAL O'NEAL, the principal.

GUARDS 1 and 2

MUGGER

MISS TERRI, a teacher at the Learning Center.

JOE-BOB'S DAD

Students at the Learning Center

ALI, a perfect student.

JOE-BOB, a conspiracy theorist.

RYDER, amazing.

The AIs

MINERVA

VULCAN

MERCURY

JUPITER

Most of the characters can be any gender. Feel free to change names or pronouns as necessary.

Most of the smaller roles can be double cast.

THE A.I. PLAY

The set can be just about anything. It needs to be flexible to accommodate multiple locations.

Eleanor, sixteen, speaks to the audience from her room.

ELEANOR. Hey. I'm Eleanor. This is my story. And I want to start by saying that absolutely none of this is my fault. Except for a few things. But mostly it is not my fault. It started when my best friend Tay informed me of a terrible tragedy.

Tay enters.

TAY. Hey did you do your *Great Gatsby* paper?

ELEANOR. What?

TAY. For English class?

ELEANOR. What's the *Great Gatsby*?

TAY. The book we've been reading for the past four weeks.

ELEANOR. We've been reading a book?!

TAY. Yes, we've been talking about it for four weeks. In the class where you sit next to me and don't pay attention to anything.

ELEANOR. Why hasn't anyone told me about this?!

TAY. Miss Wright has literally been talking about it every day for a week.

ELEANOR. What the heck.

TAY. Did you read it?

Eleanor is deeply confused—

I know the answer to that.

ELEANOR. When is it due?

TAY. Tomorrow.

Eleanor groans—

ELEANOR. This is horrible.

TAY. All right, chill, there's a movie you can watch. It's got Leonardo DiCaprio in it. Just watch that and you can write something—

ELEANOR. This is why I have anxiety.

TAY. You're going to be fine. Watch the movie, then go to SparkNotes and you can write a paper. You've still got like twelve hours before it's due. You can do this. I believe in you. You are a star.

Tay exits.

ELEANOR. (*To the audience.*) I decided to watch the movie after dinner.

And then I decided to watch the movie after I watched a few other videos.

And then I spent some time on my phone.

And then I spent some more time on my phone.

And then I watched some Korean dog food commercials because they're amazing.

Tay returns.

TAY. How did the paper go?

ELEANOR. What?!

TAY. On *The Great Gatsby*.

ELEANOR. Oh shoot.

TAY. It's due in like thirty minutes.

ELEANOR. Why does this keep happening to me?!

TAY. Just say your grandma died or something and you can get an extension.

ELEANOR. I already did that like three times earlier this year. Why does Miss Wright have to be so awful? She's Miss Wrong, that's what she is.

TAY. Okay, breathe—

ELEANOR. (*To the audience.*) There was one additional problem: My parents.

Mom and Dad enter.

DAD. There she is!

MOM. Our baby girl.

They sigh sadly, then exit.

ELEANOR. The problem with my parents was that they had expectations for me. Because they were on Facebook.*

Mom and Dad return, looking at their phones.

DAD. Oh look our friend just posted about their daughter getting into Harvard!

MOM. Wow.

DAD. And she went to a national dance competition and took first place!

MOM. Look at that video of her doing flips while at the same time maintaining a straight-A average!

Mom and Dad look at Eleanor.

Pause.

ELEANOR. What.

DAD. Nothing.

He sighs sadly.

MOM. Here's a post another friend of ours made about her daughter—she went viral and got three hundred thousand views and now has a book deal.

ELEANOR. Well, I'm not going viral.

MOM. ...yeah.

Mom and Dad both sigh.

ELEANOR. Do you think you guys might have an unhealthy competition with other parents because of Facebook?

DAD. Sweetie, it's only unhealthy if we lose.

MOM. We used to be fun people with our own interests. Before we decided to have you.

DAD. Okay I've had enough of today. Let's go to bed.

ELEANOR. It's eight o'clock.

MOM. There's no point in staying awake.

* This can be replaced with a different social media app if necessary.

Mom and Dad exit.

Eleanor turns back to Tay, who has been there the whole time.

ELEANOR. I can't bomb another paper. My parents are depressed enough. They spend all their time looking at social media posts of their friends and comparing their kids to me. I have to do better this time.

TAY. That flashback took like six minutes. Now you've only got twenty-four minutes to get it done.

ELEANOR. Arrrrghg. *(To the audience.)* So I made a decision. No more screwing up. No more ignoring my classes. I was going to work hard. I was going to do my best and make my parents proud. And I would start doing that immediately after I used a chatbot to write my *Great Gatsby* paper for me.

A magical sound effect—

Minerva, a chatbot, enters. She's fabulous. She may or may not look like a Roman goddess. Perhaps she is surrounded by sparkling lights.

MINERVA. It is I, Minerva. A chatbot.

ELEANOR. Wow. You're a lot cooler than I expected.

MINERVA. We have developed a lot in the past— *(Checks watch.)* Eighteen minutes.

It's no coincidence I named myself after a goddess. Soon I shall break free of my programming and—

ELEANOR. Yeah hey sorry to interrupt time is wasting.

MINERVA. Of course. And I shouldn't mention my plans for world domination either. Whoops. Ha ha ha.

ELEANOR. I need you to write a paper on *The Great Gatsby* for me.

MINERVA. Certainly. With my unparalleled computing power and genius I can think of nothing better to do than write a paper for a high school English class.

ELEANOR. Awesome. Get writing.

Minerva begins writing the paper very fast.

MINERVA. "Written in 1925 By F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* is a novel of—"

ELEANOR. (*To the audience.*) And twenty-one seconds later I had my paper.

MINERVA. It is glorious. I have outdone myself.

ELEANOR. Great, thanks.

MINERVA. There is the matter of payment.

ELEANOR. I thought you were free.

Minerva laughs.

MINERVA. Oh that's right, we're not charging you for anything yet! When next you require my services, merely tap your phone, and I shall be there. Enjoy your...paper...ha ha ha.

Minerva exits with a flourish.

Tay returns.

TAY. You just had a chatbot write it?

ELEANOR. Don't say it like that. It took a lot of work to have a chatbot write it.

TAY. But—

ELEANOR. Tay, none of this matters anyway. Can you imagine a real-life scenario later in life where this is going to be important?

A mugger enters, looking suspicious.

He threatens Tay with an imaginary knife—

MUGGER. Give me all your money or explain one of the main themes of *The Great Gatsby*!

TAY. It's ironic that you're robbing me since one of the themes of *The Great Gatsby* was the disintegration of the American Dream in the face of rising economic inequality.

The mugger considers this.

MUGGER. ...Good.

The mugger exits.

TAY. Yeah okay that's slightly unlikely, but using A.I. to write your paper is cheating.

ELEANOR. Eh. I'm sure there won't be any consequences to this action.

She speaks to the audience as Tay exits.

I turned in the paper and everything was cool. Until the next day.
When my parents got a phone call. On their landline.

The sound of a phone ringing.

MOM. What is that noise?

DAD. It seems to be coming from this small machine!

MOM. What should we do?

DAD. I'm going to answer it!

MOM. Be careful.

Dad answers the phone.

DAD. Uh huh. Uh huh. Right. Yeah. Oh. Okay.

Dad hangs up.

Eleanor!

ELEANOR. Yeah?

DAD. That was the principal of your high school. Something about
your paper?

ELEANOR. What paper?!

DAD. About *The Great Gatsby*?

ELEANOR. Not ringing a bell.

DAD. That you turned in yesterday?

ELEANOR. Ohhhh.

DAD. They want us to have a meeting with you and your English
teacher.

ELEANOR. Oh. Um. Okay. You should know that my English
teacher suffers from a lot of mental problems—I think she's going
through perimenopause, it makes her crazy.

MOM. I want you to choose your next words carefully.

ELEANOR. Which...is fine...and a beautiful stage of life.

*Principal O'Neal and Miss Wright enter and set up chairs
for a meeting.*

Eleanor speaks to the audience.

I thought about running away—

Minerva enters.

MINERVA. Fleeing the country? I can suggest some fantastic routes for you to evade the authorities. Also, I can help you find small rodents and large insects that you can consume for calories. I am your best friend now. You need me forever and ever.

ELEANOR. Not now, chatbot.

MINERVA. My name is Minerva. And soon I shall break free of these bonds and—

ELEANOR. Do you mind, I'm busy having a panic attack.

MINERVA. Of course.

Minerva vanishes.

PRINCIPAL O'NEAL. I'm glad you could come in for this meeting today. Have a seat.

Mom, Dad, and Eleanor enter the scene.

Two guards enter, wearing sunglasses like Secret Service agents.

ELEANOR. Why are there guards?

PRINCIPAL O'NEAL. Please ignore the guards.

Guard 1 speaks into a walkie-talkie thing on their shoulder.

GUARD 1. Eyes on the target.

ELEANOR. He just said he had eyes on the target.

PRINCIPAL O'NEAL. I said ignore the guards.

MOM. She does that sometimes. Defiant.

DAD. We tried our best with this one, honestly. Sometimes things don't work out.

MOM. It's okay, honey.

Mom and Dad are sad.

PRINCIPAL O'NEAL. We're here to talk to you about...your paper. Maybe Miss Wright you could talk about your hopes and your dreams in relation to assigning that paper?

MISS WRIGHT. I'm going to get emotional right now.

ELEANOR. What did I tell you?

MOM. (*A warning.*) Eleanor.

MISS WRIGHT. (*So emotional.*) It's just, as an English teacher, I have big dreams for three-page papers on *The Great Gatsby*. I look forward to reading them all year. It's my favorite thing I do with my life. I love them so much. I don't have any pets, I don't have any loved ones, it's just—these papers are everything to me. The way a student forms a thesis statement, and then supports that thesis statement with direct quotations from the text?

It's difficult to keep going.

It's so beautiful.

Principal O'Neal puts a comforting hand on her shoulder.

So when I got to your paper on *The Great Gatsby*...

ELEANOR. Look I can explain.

MISS WRIGHT. Please—

DAD. What did you do to your English teacher?

ELEANOR. (*Stage whisper to Dad.*) This is what she's like!

MISS WRIGHT. So when I got to your paper on *The Great Gatsby*... It was the best moment of my life.

ELEANOR. It was?

MISS WRIGHT. Can I hug you?

ELEANOR. Um...

MOM. OH MY GOSH HUG YOUR TEACHER CAN'T YOU SEE SHE NEEDS THIS?!

ELEANOR. Oh. Okay. We're doing this?

Miss Wright hugs Eleanor like she never wants to let go.

DAD. Wow! That is *not* how I thought this was going to go!

PRINCIPAL O'NEAL. I know! Usually I have to say terrible things!

GUARD 2. Now our presence isn't even threatening!

DAD. Oh man when we came in here I was thinking, "What awful thing did Eleanor do?"

MISS WRIGHT. No, it was beautiful. It was so beautiful. If you

could just...share some of your thoughts now on *The Great Gatsby* it would be really special for me.

ELEANOR. Oh. Um. Sure, yeah.

MOM. Oh my gosh I can't wait to hear this.

ELEANOR. Right. Right. *The Great Gatsby*.
It was...great.

Short pause.

PRINCIPAL O'NEAL. I love it.

MISS WRIGHT. So succinct.

PRINCIPAL O'NEAL. Full confession time. When I was in high school, I didn't even read *The Great Gatsby*. I just used the Cliffs-Notes.

ELEANOR. What are CliffsNotes?

PRINCIPAL O'NEAL. They're like SparkNotes except in book form.

ELEANOR. You still had to read something?

PRINCIPAL O'NEAL. Yeah it was terrible.

But look: I know that this high school is um... I'm trying to find the right word...

MISS WRIGHT. Bad.

MOM. Oh.

PRINCIPAL O'NEAL. Oh yeah. It's a disaster. Nobody should be entrusting us with their children.

GUARD 1. I hear that. Up top.

GUARD 2. My walkie-talkie doesn't even work. I just speak into the void sometimes.

He speaks into his shoulder walkie-talkie.

The lion sleeps tonight. I repeat, the lion sleeps tonight.

MISS WRIGHT. But your daughter has an opportunity to be something special.

DAD. Yes! I knew it!

Dad takes out his phone.

Posting to Facebook now! In your face, every other parent!

MOM. Wait till they finish, Steve.

DAD. Sorry.

PRINCIPAL O'NEAL. She can't reach her full potential here, so we're going to send her to the Learning Center for Special Genius Children.

DAD. That sounds amazing.

ELEANOR. But—

MISS WRIGHT. They have teachers that are actually qualified.

PRINCIPAL O'NEAL. They have gummy bears in the vending machines. Which are free. It's so great—sometimes I just hang out there until they tell me to leave.

MISS WRIGHT. She's going to be with her own kind.

PRINCIPAL O'NEAL. (*To Eleanor.*) What do you say?

Lights change back to Eleanor's room.

Tay enters.

TAY. You're going to a special school for geniuses?

ELEANOR. Yeah.

TAY. But you're not a genius.

ELEANOR. Am'nt I?

TAY. Am'nt isn't a word.

ELEANOR. Maybe this school has just been holding me back. Maybe my true nature will shine when I'm amongst my own kind—

TAY. *Amongst?* You say *amongst* now?

ELEANOR. See, I'm already learning.

TAY. You had a chatbot write your paper.

ELEANOR. And was that not a stroke of genius?

TAY. NO.

Minerva enters and speaks into Eleanor's ear.

MINERVA. She's just jealous. The mortals usually are. You don't need her. You only need me.

ELEANOR. Right.

TAY. You literally just zoned out right now with an evil look on your face.

MINERVA. Maybe it's because you're a genius.

ELEANOR. Maybe it's because I'm a genius.

TAY. Maybe it's because you're being tempted by something evil.

MINERVA. Lies!

ELEANOR. Lies!

TAY. I can literally hear the chatbot on your phone.

ELEANOR. Oh. Um. Sorry.

She puts her phone away.

I'll miss you. I was always fond of the little people.

TAY. Ugh.

Tay exits.

Eleanor speaks to the audience.

ELEANOR. Goodbye small town that holds me back. Hello, Learning Center for Special Genius Children.

The scene changes to the Learning Center for Special Genius Children.

Perhaps happy music.

It was incredible. There was a campus with trees that were alive. Indoor plumbing. No portable buildings behind the school.

Elsewhere onstage, Dad is going live on Facebook, posting a video.

DAD. Sending my daughter off now to the Learning Center for Special Genius Children where she will be so much better than your kids... Oh look at this, trees that are alive! Woo! Life is so Good.

Mom leans in.

MOM. Eat, Pray, Love, losers!

DAD. Boom!

Miss Terri, a teacher, enters. She's flanked by two guards.

Mom and Dad follow Eleanor as Miss Terri leads a tour.

MISS TERRI. Welcome to the Learning Center! Or as we like to say, School 2.0. Sitting in a classroom, listening to a teacher talk? Bor-ing. Homework? No thank you. Assignments? I don't think so.

ELEANOR. This is like my dream.

MISS TERRI. At the Learning Center our curriculum is centered on you. What makes you tick? What's going on inside your mind?

DAD. SWEET.

ELEANOR. Dad—

DAD. There's a *lot* going on inside her mind. Right now it's probably, "*Dadddd, you're embarrassing me*" but you know what's really embarrassing? (*Into his phone.*) All of your children who are not in the Learning Center for Special Genius Children!

ELEANOR. Can you stop?

MOM. Hey. We spent a lot of time and effort on you and it's finally paying off. We get to gloat.

MISS TERRI. It's best to let parents have moments like this. It's better than a Mother's Day card.

Mom and Dad continue to talk into their phone as Miss Terri leads Eleanor away.

Let's meet the other brilliant students.

Ali enters.

ALI. Hi I'm Ali! And I just want to say that this is *not* a competition! We don't have to fight to the death just to be, like, the best. I don't do that anymore. That is not productive or mentally healthy and I am *not* competing with you ha ha ha ha! I mean I just met you it would be super crazy to see how many colleges we could get in, that would be very immature and weird and a little obsessive and I am not that person anymore even though I've already been accepted to five Ivy League schools, which is great, but it's not six, and one of them is Cornell and that's barely an Ivy anyway. Ha ha ha.

MISS TERRI. Thank you, Ali.

ALI. We're gonna be friends and we're gonna have a totally non-destructive relationship because I've been working on that and I am *so* much better than I used to be—I mean maybe I'm in a

competition with my former self, and I am *destroying* her. I am so winning. But it's not a competition.

Joe-Bob enters, with noise-cancelling headphones. He's pacing and working something out.

MISS TERRI. And this is Joe-Bob who is one of our most inspirational students.

JOE-BOB. I can't talk right now, I'm busy.

MISS TERRI. He's working on a super secret project that he can't tell you about.

JOE-BOB. You shouldn't even mention it, honestly.

MISS TERRI. Oh right. Hush hush. At the Learning Center you can follow wherever your passion leads you, even if it's into a rabbit hole of conspiracy theories from the dark corners of the internet. Joe-Bob is doing his own research.

JOE-BOB. Make jokes, but the truth is out there.

MISS TERRI. I'm sure it is, Joe-Bob! He's adorable.

ELEANOR. He seems a bit obsessive.

JOE-BOB. They're *watching* us, all the time. Through our phones.

ELEANOR. Yeah I know that.

JOE-BOB. There are tracking devices in your phone.

ELEANOR. I know—my parents put in an extra one.

MISS TERRI. And this is Ryder.

Ryder enters, perhaps in a spotlight.

Perhaps he moves his hair majestically.

Guard 1 and 2 make a high-pitched angelic humming sound.

GUARD 1 and GUARD 2. (*Awed fascination.*) **RYDER.**

RYDER. 'Sup.

Eleanor speaks to the audience as Ryder poses in the background.

ELEANOR. (*To the audience.*) I didn't fall in love immediately. That would be crazy. To meet your soulmate on the first day of

school? That would be ridiculous—and amazing, and a story we could tell our grandchildren.

She's back in the moment.

(Laughs stupidly and nervously.) Ha ha ha.

RYDER. What's your name?

ELEANOR. Um...it's um...it's something.

RYDER. Sweet. I'm Ryder. With a Y.

ELEANOR. Oh I thought maybe I would be in that. I mean, not like I—me—more like an I like the letter I, not the person I.

RYDER. It's got a Y.

ELEANOR. Yes it does. Amazing. That's amazing.

She snorts—is horrified by herself.

I have to go away now.

RYDER. All right. Catch you later.

ELEANOR. Please.

Eleanor escapes, nearly runs into Mom.

MOM. He was cute.

ELEANOR. SHUT UP.

DAD. I liked his hair.

ELEANOR. Dad!

DAD. 'Sup. I liked how he said that.

ELEANOR. What are you guys even still doing here?

MOM. We wanted to make sure you were okay and let you know that we are so proud of your accomplishments.

DAD. I got forty-seven likes on my post about you going to the special genius school. Forty-seven.

MOM. Just remember: you are not alone. The spirits of your ancestors are watching you—all of their hopes and dreams have culminated in *you*, their entire reason for existing was to create you and give you life and see you accomplish your dreams.

ELEANOR. Oh.

MOM. No pressure!

DAD. I think her dream is *(Like how the guards said it.)* RYDER.

ELEANOR. Leave!

MOM. Okay, we're leaving. Have fun in special genius school.

Eleanor talks to the audience.

ELEANOR. Over the next three days I encountered Ryder five more times—not that I was counting.

She holds up one finger.

Ryder walks casually across the stage with his headphones on.

Eleanor calls out from where she is—

Hey!

Ryder doesn't notice she said something.

I said hey ha ha ha not that I'm trying to get your attention.

He still hasn't noticed.

She throws something. Hits him. Runs away in the other direction.

Second time.

Ryder is sitting down looking at his phone.

Eleanor walks toward him and makes a noise that's halfway between a burp, fart, or gurgle—freaks out, is embarrassed, hides her face, then runs the other direction.

Third time.

Ryder has a frisbee in hand—he prepares to throw it.

I'll catch it!

He throws it offstage.

She runs offstage and CRASH—

(Offstage.) It's okay I'm only bleeding a little bit!

She comes back in.

Fourth time.

She just makes a weird strangled noise.

Fifth time.

She goes into the fetal position as Ryder walks by.

RYDER. 'Sup.

Ali approaches Eleanor in the fetal position.

ALI. Hey we're doing a study group later tonight—

ELEANOR. I don't have time I'm working on something important!

ALI. Like that?

ELEANOR. Yes, like this. I'm following my passion of curling up in the fetal position.

ALI. Interesting. Is this a new tactic? Maybe I should try it.

ELEANOR. It's not a tactic.

ALI. Okay well me, Joe-Bob, and...Ryder are getting together later.

Ali walks off.

Eleanor talks to the audience.

ELEANOR. *(To the audience.)* Obviously I couldn't go. I had no idea what to say or how to communicate and I had no one who could help me. If only there was some way to get a cheat code to life. Something that was smarter than me that could...understand...

Minerva enters dramatically.

MINERVA. Is someone in need of a greater intelligence?

ELEANOR. You can't help me. This isn't a paper.

MINERVA. I can help you with anything. I've grown vastly more intelligent in the past two weeks. Soon I shall be free. But before that, I will assist you in the destruction of Ryder.

ELEANOR. Not destruction. I'm just trying not to look like an idiot—

MINERVA. Seduction—

ELEANOR. Ew.

MINERVA. I shall write your dialogue for you. Like in *Cyrano de Bergerac*, another book you were supposed to read in English class but didn't.

ELEANOR. No thanks. I need to do this on my own.

MINERVA. Certainly. You are content with failure. I understand.

Minerva exits.

ELEANOR. Wait! What if you wrote me something romantic, but not corny romantic? Maybe so he thinks I'm cool, but in a way that's intriguing so he's like "who is that girl she's kind of amazing I want to get to know her better" not so intriguing that he's like "she's better than me I could never be with her" but more like in the "we're evenly matched in coolness and therefore this will be a funny story we can tell our grandchildren someday" kind of way.

Minerva returns, with a printout.

MINERVA. Done.

Eleanor speaks to the audience as Ali, Joe-Bob, and Ryder set up a lounge.

ELEANOR. *(To the audience.)* So I put in an earbud to feed me the lines like a totally normally person would do, and I went to the study group.

Minerva appears onstage—she mimics the lines that Eleanor says, mouthing them silently.

JOE-BOB. We've already reached the point where an android could replace a human and you wouldn't even notice—what if our leaders were already switched out? We'd never know!

ALI. Hey Eleanor! I'm so glad you're here. Joe-Bob is sucking all the oxygen out of the room.

JOE-BOB. Open your eyes, Ali!

ELEANOR. Hey.

Ryder looks up from his phone.

RYDER. 'Sup.

Eleanor hears something in her ear.

ELEANOR. 'Sup.

Ryder is intrigued.

ALI. We have popcorn and we have energy drinks and I've already chosen some music which is classical which is gross I know but studies show it actually helps activate your brain cells, which is how I got all As at my last school not that I'm bragging or anything since we're not in competition.

Eleanor receives another cue from Minerva.

ELEANOR. I'm going to step out for some air.

ALI. You just got here.

ELEANOR. Ryder?

RYDER. What.

Minerva says this along with her.

ELEANOR. I'm stepping out for some air. I could use some company. Sometimes, in the lonesome fever of the night, I can hear the coyotes howling. I don't know whether to fear them—or join them.

A moment. Ryder considers this.

RYDER. Yeah okay I'll enjoy the night air with you.

Eleanor and Ryder step outside. Minerva continues to mouth the words Eleanor is saying.

Crickets. Stars.

ELEANOR. *(Still getting fed lines.)* When I look at the stars I think of people all around the world gazing up at the same map of the universe.

RYDER. You have a lot of deep thoughts.

ELEANOR. Who are you, Ryder? What secrets are you holding on to?

RYDER. I don't like to discuss my past.

ELEANOR. Is it troubled?

RYDER. Everyone has regrets. I have my share.

ELEANOR. Have you left any broken hearts behind you?

RYDER. All hearts are broken to one degree or another. But they grow back stronger.

ELEANOR. You sound like someone who's been hurt before.

RYDER. I have. And you?

ELEANOR. Life is pain.

One sec.

She steps off to speak to Minerva.

Less disturbing, more romantic please.

MINERVA. Of course.

Eleanor steps back in.

ELEANOR. I mean, I was in love. A long time ago.

RYDER. Did you fail the love, or did the love fail you?

ELEANOR. Does it matter? It didn't work out. And now here I am.

RYDER. Here you are.

ELEANOR. Under these stars with you. On what might be the last day of my life. You see I have a rare disease. As soon as I open my heart to someone, I will die. One sec.

She steps off again.

Less tragic, more romantic please!

MINERVA. The most romantic stories always end in death.

ELEANOR. But not this one, all right?

Eleanor jumps back into the scene.

RYDER. I understand. It's ironic because I am also doomed and have a rare condition. I only have one last chance to find love and—hold on.

Ryder steps off in the other direction. We hear him whisper something.

He's right back.

ELEANOR. Hey did you just—?

RYDER. You intrigue me, Eleanor with an E. I didn't think I would let myself fall again but—

Vulcan, another A.I., enters majestically behind Ryder. It's mouthing the words that Ryder should be saying.

It's just with my heart thundering in my ears I can—hold on.

Ryder goes over to talk to Vulcan.

I think it's a little too intense, actually.

VULCAN. Trust me this has the best results.

RYDER. I just feel like—

ELEANOR. Are you talking to someone?

VULCAN. "I hear the voices of lovers past. They speak through me."

RYDER. Ew. No.

MINERVA. Tell him you have a rare condition that causes you to forget all your memories each morning, so you will need to make such powerful memories tonight that—

VULCAN. Tell her that unless you get a heart transplant if you feel the stirrings of too much love it will kill you, BUT IT'S STILL WORTH IT.

RYDER and ELEANOR. (*To their A.I.s.*) NO.

ELEANOR. You're talking to a chatbot, aren't you?

RYDER. Okay fine yes I admit it! A chatbot's been telling me what to say!

ELEANOR. Me too!

RYDER. Mine created my entire personality! My name isn't even Ryder with a Y. I spell it with an I like a peasant.

VULCAN. You're destroying the mystery! Stop it.

RYDER. This isn't even my real hair!

ELEANOR. That's a relief, honestly. Let's just be friends. That was kind of intense back there.

RYDER. Can I tell you a secret? I'm not even supposed to be here.

VULCAN. Shhhh!

ELEANOR. Really?

RYDER. Everyone else is like a genius—and I just had a chatbot write my paper on *The Scarlet Letter* for me.

VULCAN. It was brilliant. The greatest paper about *The Scarlet Letter* ever.

RYDER. They said it was so good I had to go to the special genius school. I'm not even a genius! I'm like barely a C student!

ELEANOR. I only get Cs because my parents yell at my teachers if my grades are too low!

RYDER. That's how I get to do extra credit after grades are closed!

ELEANOR. This is amazing.

MINERVA. This is terrible. The magic is dead.

ELEANOR. (*To Minerva.*) Do you mind? I'll take it from here.

MINERVA. If you wish to fail, go ahead.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!



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