

ACT I

(Holding a pad of paper and pen, BRIE ENTERS SR, smiles blissfully as she writes)

BRIE Though Lady Jablinovich was not rich, she was very thrifty.

(LADY J ENTERS from the book, walks regally to CENTERSTAGE. Four SERVANTS follow, o-o-o and ah-h-h, clasping their hands together in abject adulation)

BRIE *(Continued)* With only shreds of her dead mother's great ball gown, and some odd remnants, she managed to sew together the most beautiful dress in all of England!

SERVANT-1 You are a vision, miss.

SERVANT-2 Oh, Lady Jablinovich!

SERVANT-3 How beautiful! Is she not beautiful?

SERVANT-4 Every gentleman at the ball will want to dance with you, miss.

(LADY J smiles, takes in the compliments)

LADY J Surely the Baron will overlook my lack of great wealth --

BRIE -- thought Lady Jablinovich. But alas, little did she know of the Baron's gambling debts.

MAN'S VOICE *(Offstage)* Miss Jablinovich?

(BRIE stops. Fearful, LADY J and the SERVANTS race back into the book)

MAN'S VOICE *(Continued)* Miss Jablinovich? Are you listening?

(Brie's eyes scan left and right. She suddenly develops a look of horror. Meanwhile, a TEACHER (THE VOICE) ENTERS SL along with STUDENTS quickly wheeling a chalkboard. HE strides toward Brie. OTHER STUDENTS wheel "student-desks" out from SR, head toward BRIE. The first desk, empty, quickly approaches Brie, almost runs into her. She sits on it. All quickly close in on her. NOTE: There is a bookbag bearing Brie's supplies on the dolly)

TEACHER An answer, Miss Jablinovich?

BRIE *(SHE pulls books from under the desk, fumbles with them, opens one)* If it's about the interest rate...and the reduction if we paid down the national debt, then I --

TEACHER It's not about the national debt. Any other guesses?

BRIE *(weakly)* ... No, that was it.

TEACHER Are you writing your romance stories again, Miss Jablinovich?
(STUDENTS CHORTLE, circle BRIE)

BRIE No, I'm not. As much as I'd like to, I just don't have the time.
(The STUDENTS turn the platform on which BRIE sits, address her one at a time)

STUDENT 1 *(picks up a novel from beside BRIE, from the floor)* Who's this Jane Austen?

BRIE Give me that.

STUDENT 2 Mansfield Park? What is that, a baseball romance?

STUDENT 3 Jane Austen's dead, isn't she?

BRIE A writer like Jane never dies. She lives forever in our hearts.
(ALL bellow with LAUGHTER)

TEACHER Miss Jablinovich, if you want to be taken seriously as an economics major, you're going to have to give up these foolish stories.
(BRIE stands, grabs the books away from the STUDENTS)

BRIE I know that. It's just a hobby, that's all. And who needs romance when you have the Dow Jones and the S and P index.

TEACHER Very well put. Now then...
(HE writes on the chalkboard as STUDENTS push it SL. ALL EXIT besides BRIE, who sits alone on the wooden dolly -- in front of the student-desk, head in hands)

BRIE Dad, I'm gonna be an English major, simple as that. *(SHE shakes her head, unsatisfied)* You know I wouldn't have been good in insurance. I'm too left-brained. *(pause -- a new thought)* Dad, you really should have had more than one child. *(beat, then somberly)* Like he hears anything I say. *(SHE takes one of the books from beside her, opens it, searches)* I'd have better luck talking to the book. If Jane Austen were here, she'd figure something out. Everything always works out in the end. The young woman gets her prince charming even though she sticks to her guns. *(SHE slams*

the book shut, CALLS out to the great beyond...) Come on, Jane. You can give me a hint, can't you? What should I do? *(pause... nothing. She opens a novel)* It's all here -- domineering father, extremely beautiful but troubled daughter. Okay, the father's dead in this one. *(picks up another)* He's funny and nice in this one. *(looks up)* You're some help. *(picks up another, glances through it, throws it across the stage, SHOUTS angrily)* Come on Jane, you're my only hope! I'm desperate! *(gets down on her knees)* I pray to you, Jane Austen. If a person is allowed to pray to someone that isn't an official saint, I pray to you. Jane, help?

(A LIGHT shines on BRIE. Startled, SHE stands. LIGHTS FLICKER. Out of the book ENTERS a middle-aged Victorian WOMAN, JANE. Brie's jaw drops.

BRIE *(Continued)* Get out of town.

JANE *(dramatically)* I am Jane Austen.

(BRIE just stares)

I have heard your pleas and am here to help.

BRIE I... I...

JANE I understand you desire to become a writer.

(BRIE nods)

JANE *(Continued)* I can see why. You are no conversationalist.

BRIE Do you come down every time somebody calls upon you?

JANE No, my dear. It was just that your plea sounded so heartfelt.

BRIE Really?

JANE *(nods, then a beat)* That plus it is the two-hundredth anniversary of my first novel, and my publicist thought this would be a good career move.

BRIE You have a publicist?

JANE Don't we all? *(JANE walks OFFSTAGE and into the AUDIENCE)*

BRIE Jane? Where are you going?

JANE There is work to be done, child.

BRIE Work? Aren't you like... retired? *(SHE grabs her book bag, follows*

JANE into the AUDIENCE. JANE walks up the AISLE)

Meanwhile, STUDENTS fill the STAGE, cart off the dolly. Two throw a frisbee back and forth. A GIRL brings a towel, opens it and lays down with two friends. A GUY tries to "make time" with her) (A ROLLER BLADER skates around, as well as a SKATEBOARDER... all as quietly as possible)

JANE I am here only for a brief time. We must mend your tattered life.

BRIE Oh. That's good. I really appreciate that. *(beat)* Are you going outside? There's a lot of people on campus now. They'll see you.

(JANE heads back toward the stage, using a different route if possible)

JANE Only you can see me. So, it is best you keep your voice down. Otherwise, your next address will be at the sanitarium.

(JANE and BRIE ENTER. A YOUNG WOMAN with a tank top and hot pants also ENTERS from the other side of the stage, dances as she approaches JANE. Jane's eyebrows rise with distaste.

JANE *(Continued)* Insufferable.

BRIE If no one can see you, how are you gonna talk to my dad?

JANE I am not speaking to your father. You are.

BRIE I am? If that's the case, how are you mending my tattered life?

(STUDENTS overhear BRIE, looks strangely at her. Brie's voice trails off as she realizes how she must look)

BRIE *(Continued)* Oh... Don't worry. I'm under psychiatric supervision.

(THE STUDENTS blankly nod. STUDENTS EXIT)

JANE He compels you to learn economics when you have no mind for such matters.

BRIE It's true. I don't. And Jane, oh, can I call you Jane?

JANE May I call you Jane?

BRIE If you want, but won't that be confusing?

JANE What I am saying is you must say may I, not can I.

BRIE Right, Jane, I guess it's important to have good grammar, but the

bigger problem is how I'm gonna sell my Dad on changing majors.

JANE Changing majors?

BRIE Right. To English Literature, or maybe the classics.

JANE Oh no, child. That will not do. You must drop out of college altogether.

BRIE What?! Drop out of college? I can't drop out of college

JANE I never attended college and I wrote "Pride and Prejudice" when I was twenty-one.

BRIE You did? Twenty-one?

JANE If I attended college in those days, I would not have begun my first novel. Just think, you would be deprived of some of the finest literary works.

BRIE Drop out?

JANE If you wish to write well, you do not need school. Immerse yourself in people and new situations. Observe everything.

BRIE I don't know.

JANE Yes. You do not know. But you will learn. You will learn to write and write well.

BRIE How can I with no classes? Without formal education --

JANE You will have the best education in the world.

BRIE You, Jane? You'll teach me?

JANE Yes. We will begin tomorrow morning. Perhaps you will become another Jackie Collins.

(BRIE beams. PAMELA, fifties, wearing a house dress, ENTERS from SR. When JANE notices, she steps back)

PAMELA Brie, are you heading to school?

BRIE College, yes. See, here's my books. *(holds them up)* Heading to classes -- good ol' economics.

PAMELA Can you swing by the drug store on your way home? The druggist has something for my mold spores.

BRIE Sure. Did dad leave yet?

PAMELA It's been quiet, so then yes. He must have.

BRIE *(smiles widely)* Okay. Bye.
(PAMELA EXITS SL. JANE approaches)

JANE I take it that is your mother.

BRIE Yes.

JANE You were not adopted.

BRIE No.

JANE This may be more difficult that I had imagined.

BRIE *(BRIE pulls out a notebook, pencils, and a pencil sharpener)* Well then... pencils, notebook, pencil sharpener... I'm very prepared.
(JANE nods, watches patiently as BRIE sharpens a pencil, pulls out another, twists it into the sharpener)

JANE Now then...

BRIE Just a second.
(JANE frowns as BRIE finishes her pencil)

BRIE *(Continued)* There.

JANE The first rule of literature -- write what you know.

BRIE ... But I don't know anything.
(JANE nods patiently, concealing unfathomable vexation)

BRIE *(Continued)* But I want to write a romance. It has to be a romance.

JANE Good -- a romance. Have you thought about your protagonist?

BRIE A beautiful young heroine, that has almost no money, but her rich, handsome suitor doesn't care. He loves her for what she is.

JANE Which is what?
(BRIE shrugs)

JANE *(Continued)* My suggestion is... for believability, you base your

heroine on yourself.

BRIE Really?

JANE You want her emotions to ring true with your reader. If you conjure up your own emotions, your character will come alive in the mind of your reader.

(LADY J ENTERS from the book, smiles blissfully)

BRIE What if she were smarter than all the men around her? Only she plays dumb so they won't get intimidated by her beauty or her brains?

(LADY J hits her head with hand -- signifying she's a ditz. JANE frowns)

JANE I don't know if acting stupidly sends a good message to your audience, namely young women.

(BRIE nods)

Besides, smarter than all the men around -- that is not you at all.

(BRIE and LADY J sadly nod)

BRIE Right. How can I write a novel? I know so little about the world.

JANE Then do research.

BRIE Research? All right. I'll go to the library and I'll --

JANE No, no. You are writing about life... Live! Don't hide away in some dusty library. Live and observe.

BRIE Right. I'll do some observing before I write anything.

(Head lowered, LADY J EXITS into the book)

JANE I will check up on you in a few days. Good luck, my dear.

BRIE Thanks, Jane.

(JANE EXITS SR. Brie's beautiful friend, DANA, ENTERS SL. Dressed in short, white tennis attire, she holds two racquetball rackets)

DANA Brie? I heard you dropped out of school. Is that true?

BRIE Well, yeah, but it's so I can grow as a writer.

DANA Can't you grow as a writer and get your MBA at the same time?

BRIE I think there's laws against that.

(DANA hands BRIE a racquet, they fake-play racquetball against the back wall)

DANA You sure this isn't the death instinct surfacing? Thanatos revisited?

BRIE What is that? Freudian mumbo jumbo?

DANA We're all layers of unconscious turmoil, Pickle. It all comes out in the wash sometime.

BRIE Wanting to become a writer has nothing to do with a death instinct.

DANA When you tell your father, it will be.

(BRIE stops, lets the fake ball go by, loses the point)

DANA *(Continued)* Do it in a public place.

BRIE Why?

DANA He won't make a scene. I do that when I break up with somebody -- a restaurant, library, a movie... someplace where he won't yell at you.

BRIE *(nods as she ponders this)* Or throw things. Or break things.

(A puppy-dog-faced young man, TREVOR, ENTERS SL, racquet in hand)

TREVOR So... who's winning?

BRIE *(to herself)* Definitely not me.

DANA Actually, Trevor, you're late. And I only have a short time before I've gotta go back to do evaluations.

TREVOR Sorry.

DANA Right. You're always sorry.

TREVOR That's good, isn't it? To be able to admit when you're wrong? Psychologically healthy?

DANA No, it's pathetic. A person who habitually apologizes needs help.

BRIE *(Lost in thought, she only hears the last few words from DANA)* I shouldn't apologize. This time, I should stand my ground and tell him... Dad, I don't want to run an insurance brokerage.

DANA Brie, I was talking to Trevor.

BRIE Oh.

DANA But I like your fire. Use it. Anyway, I gotta run.

TREVOR *(looks at his watch)* Even if I was here on time, that's eleven minutes of racquetball.

DANA Long enough for me to wipe the floors with your sorry bottom.

TREVOR You mean my pathetic sorry bottom, don't you?

DANA What, you think a cute little joke is gonna smooth things over?

TREVOR Dana, I was ten minutes late. It's not like I killed your cat or anything like that.

DANA Time is life. You robbed ten minutes of my life. *(to BRIE)* I'll call you later. Good luck. *(SHE EXITS SL)*

TREVOR Robbing time from her life... guess that's worse than killing pets.

BRIE I'm sorry, Trevor. I'm a little preoccupied. Can we take a rain check? I have something I need to do.

TREVOR Yeah, sure. I'm not much in a racquetball mood anyway.

(TREVOR takes Brie's racquet, EXITS SL.)

STUDENTS ROLL in with no-nonsense NATHAN, fifties, He sits at a desk with a phone, types on a computer)

NATHAN Hey, pickle. *(Nathan's eyes never leave the computer screen. STUDENTS EXIT)*

BRIE I was thinking, maybe we can have lunch... together... at a restaurant.

(NATHAN remains silent, types)

BRIE *(Continued)* Not a fast food, no. I wouldn't think of --

NATHAN Fine.

BRIE Fine?

NATHAN Yeah. What's the occasion?

BRIE Occasion?

(JANE ENTERS SR)

JANE The occasion is a party.

(BRIE GASPS with surprise. NATHAN looks up)

NATHAN What's the matter?

BRIE Nothing. A party.

NATHAN A party? For what?

JANE Your mother.

BRIE Your mother.

NATHAN My mother's dead.

BRIE I mean my mother. Your wife. Mom.

JANE Is your mother's birthday upcoming? *(BRIE quickly shakes her head)*

NATHAN *(frowns)* Let me save you some time. You want to tell me you dropped out of school, right?

BRIE *(Brie's jaw drops)* Oh.

NATHAN Yeah, the bursar's office called me yesterday. You've been out for ten days.

BRIE Actually eight days. You can't count weekends.

NATHAN Whatever. I told him you'll return to class tomorrow morning. I'll write you some kind of letter. And you will make up all the work you've missed. Is that clear?

BRIE Yes, very. Thank you.

(JANE GASPS)

NATHAN Good night.

JANE And that's it? *(SHE approaches Nathan's desk. NATHAN doesn't hear anything, goes back to his computer)*

BRIE *(feebly)* Good night.

JANE *(to Brie)* No! This is your life, my dear! You cannot stand idly by, and have your father decide who you will become.

BRIE *(quietly)* Not here.

NATHAN *(looks up)* What?

JANE Tell him!

NATHAN You'd better get cracking, Pickle. You've got a lot of work to make up.

BRIE Actually... I don't think I'm gonna do... all of it.

JANE Any of it.

BRIE Right. I'm not... I'm not...