

RAGS

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. RICHMAN ESTATE - DAY

It's another one of those naive fairytale weddings. Marshmallow clouds float across a blue martini sky. Judging from the abundance of exotic food, the beribboned wedding canopy, the open bars, and several dance bands, somebody has spent major bucks.

The theme is Camelot. MINSTRELS stroll the grounds playing lutes. WAITERS with crossbows strapped to their backs circulate among the black-tie CROWD.

ELLIE HENDERSON and CHARLES RICHMAN, the quintessential bride and groom, spring hand-in-hand across the pristine lawn. They head for an oversized, multicolored HOT AIR BALLOON.

The crowd CHEERS as Charles lifts his bride into the balloon basket and leaps to her side. She throws her bouquet. He throws her garter.

The PILOT gives a thumbs-up to his GROUND CREW. They untether the balloon and up it goes, unfurling a banner: "JUST MARRIED!" The basket swerves in a sudden gust. The pilot adjusts the sandbags and it steadies.

ELLIE

Thank God, there's a pilot.

CHARLES

I was hoping there wouldn't be. I thought it would be romantic for us to do it for the first time in the balloon.

ELLIE

You actually thought that? Are you nuts?

PILOT

Don't mind me. Pretend I'm not here. I'm a professional.

ELLIE

I don't care what you are, I'm not having sex in a hot air balloon.

The balloon swerves again.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
 Besides, it's dangerous. I could
 fall out and end up naked and dead
 down there.

A COMMOTION on the ground draws their attention. They peer
 down at the waving crowd.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
 Can you hear what they're saying?

CHARLES
 No, but some guy's waving a stick
 at us. Or maybe it's his cane.

A CROSSBOW aims up at them. MALE FINGERS draw the string
 taut.

PING.

An ARROW lodges in the side of their balloon.

Air WHOOSHES out. The balloon COLLAPSES. Their basket goes
 into a FREE-FALL.

The ground rushes up at them.

CHARLES AND ELLIE
 Aaaaaaah!

INT. THE PIT STOP BAR - NIGHT - SIX WEEKS EARLIER

The MUSIC at the SoHo pick-up bar underscores the eternal,
 primal hunt for sex and love. The chase is on.

Two women perch on adjacent bar stools nursing their drinks.
 The prettier of the two, Ellie, is a dressed-down version of
 the future bride she will soon be.

The second woman, KATE FLINT, is gay and full of moxie. She
 flirts with a female BARTENDER, FLO, who could be a pole-
 dancer, but it's not that kind of a bar.

ELLIE
 Do I look desperate to you? That's
 what I'm afraid of. That I look
 desperate and pitiful.

KATE
 Men love that. You could have a
 date with any man in this bar just
 for those two qualities alone.

ELLIE

Then I don't want a date with any man in this bar. Let's go someplace else.

KATE

Honey, there is no place else. Every meeting ground is the same.

The MAN on the next stool spins around to face her. He's Charles, her future groom, only neither of them know it. He's packed so full of Ivy League that you can't see the lost little boy inside him.

ELLIE

Why hasn't somebody come up with a huge factory-like marriage service? You'd go in single, fall asleep, and wake up married to the perfect mate.

CHARLES

Hear, hear!

ELLIE

Yet, I keep hanging out in bars or signing up on dating sites.

CHARLES

Me, too. I went speed-dating last Saturday. It was humiliating. I met ten girls in sixty minutes. The five I liked wouldn't take my number. The five losers all tried to give me theirs.

Ellie squints at him.

ELLIE

I thought I recognized you. What a jerk you were. The very least you could have done was take my number and delete it later.

CHARLES

Hmm. I'm not placing you. Wait a minute. You're not that girl with the bad hair, are you?

ELLIE

It happens, okay? My curling iron wasn't working. You weren't so cool yourself. Who wears an "I'm from Harvard" pin on their lapel?

CHARLES
At least I got five numbers. How many did you get?

ELLIE
Nine.

CHARLES
Liar.

ELLIE
Then how many do you think I got?

Awkward pause.

CHARLES
With that hair, about four.

ELLIE
Up yours.

CHARLES
Hey, I'm only the messenger.

Ellie downs her drink in a single gulp.

ELLIE
That does it. Let's get out of here, Kate.

The two slap down money and leave their stools.

CHARLES
Hey, Kate! Bring your friend back tomorrow. Same time. Same place. Better yet, I'll get here early and save you a couple of stools!

The girls are gone.

INT. PERMITS & HOUSING DEPARTMENT - DAY

Ellie and Kate pound twin keyboards in identical cubicals connected by a low partition. Ellie's side is an island of neatness, everything in its place including a name plaque reading, "ELLIE HENDERSON, CUSTOMER SPECIALIST." Alongside it is a single potted plant and a photo of a young Ellie in a Iowan cornfield.

Kate's cubical is a train wreck with clutter everywhere and a huge coffee mug balanced precariously on a stack of files. Her nearly hidden name plaque reads: "KATE FLINT, LEGAL LIAISON."

ELLIE

If I see one more slumlord today, I swear I'll squash him like a bug. Grind him with my heel ...

LESTER RICHMAN swaggers their way. He's a short, rumpled ball of corruption. You can almost smell him coming.

Ellie looks up to find Lester in her face.

LESTER

Whoa, Ellie. You look like shit. What's with those baggy eyes? Big night last night?

ELLIE

Save it, Mr. Richman. I'm not in the mood.

LESTER

So be it. Let's get to work. I'm happy to say that all those code violations turned out to be minor stuff.

ELLIE

In the court's opinion, they weren't so minor.

LESTER

I knew you'd say that. Which is why I came here in person to show you how I corrected them. I didn't send a damn lackey like so many property owners would. Me, I live by the motto if you want something done right, do it yourself.

ELLIE

When do we get to the part where you show me?

He spreads a photo-shoot on her desk.

LESTER

Feast your eyes. All that petty little nonsense, gone! Boy, did your boss Flint over there go into a hissy-fit in court last week. All for a bunch of nothing.

ELLIE
I don't call it nothing. Your poor tenants are living in abominable conditions.

LESTER
With what they're paying, should they live in The Ritz?

ELLIE
No, but your place is downright dangerous. The inspector was surprised at not finding any dead bodies in the cellar.

LESTER
You hurt me.

He pushes photos at her.

LESTER (CONT'D)
Nevertheless, I have harkened to the man's words. Imagine, all these upgrades have been done in just one week.

ELLIE
I'm not buying it, Mr. Richman.

LESTER
What am I trying to sell?

ELLIE
I'd say a batch of photo-shopped pictures. And not very good ones at that.

She points to a photo.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
Oops. You left a piece of rat turd in the hallway.

LESTER
That happens to be a natural imperfection in Brazilian redwood.

ELLIE
What's with the kitchen sink still next to the toilet? And where's the linoleum you were supposed to install?

She points to another photo.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
But this shot is the capper.

LESTER
What? What capper?

ELLIE
You see this exposed wire? A kid could electrocute himself on that thing.

LESTER
Come on, Ellie. What kid is tall enough to reach that wire? I probably couldn't even reach it myself.

ELLIE
Whatever, Mr. Richman. No matter how you cut it, you're operating a slum.

LESTER
Wow. That's cold. I'll come back when you're not having your monthly.

He scoops up the photos and walks away.

ELLIE
Don't bother coming back until everything, and I mean everything, is up to code! And by the way, the reason you couldn't reach that wire is because you're short!

Lester turns back.

LESTER
Now you really hurt me. And that's the kind of pain that doesn't easily go away.

He stares at her long and hard, then turns on his heel and strides away.

KATE
So, I take it we're on for happy hour?

ELLIE
Damn straight.

INT. THE PIT STOP BAR - NIGHT

Charles and his pals, Wall Street up-and-comers JAMES and RAJ, occupy three stools and protect two empty ones at the busy bar. The stools between Charles and Raj are "saved" by the drinks that sit in front of them.

JAMES

What makes you think this girl is going to show up?

CHARLES

Because I felt we had a real connection. Like we were intended to meet in this life.

RAJ

Dude. You're embarrassing yourself.

CHARLES

You're not hearing me. I think I've found the one.

Ellie and Kate enter into the packed Happy Hour scene.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

And there she is!

He waves.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Hey, girls! Over here! I've got seats for you!

Kate drags a less-than-enthusiastic Ellie their way.

JAMES

She's hot, I'll give you that.

CHARLES

I knew she'd come.

RAJ

I get dibbs on her friend.

JAMES

You might want to rethink that. Looks like she's got her eye on Flo.

RAJ

I'm okay with that.

Kate pushes her onto the seat nearest Charles and settles onto the other one.

ELLIE
Whose drinks are these?

CHARLES
They're just space savers. I had to replace them three times, but no matter.

He shoves the drinks away and summons Flo, the bartender.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Bring them whatever they want. Everything's on me.

ELLIE
I can't do that. I pay my own way.

KATE
Relax and go with it, Ellie.

CHARLES
Ellie. I love that name. It reminds me of a peach martini. May I order you one?

She gives a non-committal shrug.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Flo. That's one peach martini over here. And for Kate there ...

KATE
Red Bull and vodka. Thanks, uh ...

CHARLES
Charles Richman, and you're welcome Wolf Sister.

KATE
That's my spiritual name. How could you know that?

Charles points to the tattoo of foreign script on her upper arm.

CHARLES
It's your tat. Nice one. I'm guessing you got it in Thailand. If you got it in China, the Sanskrit would read the reverse: Sister Wolf.

KATE
Impressive, Mr. Richman.

CHARLES
Not really. There's only four main dialects in that region. And just call me Charles.

He turns his full attention to Ellie.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
So, Ellie, tell me everything about yourself. Got any tats for me to translate?

ELLIE
Wait a minute. I'm still back on your name. You're a Richman, huh? I know a Richman. And he's a real jerk.

CHARLES
Don't look at me like that. What makes you think that jerk's any relation of mine?

Ellie shrugs.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
So, let's get back to your life's story.

RAJ
Life's story? Just get down to it. Like this. Hey, Flo. Want to hook up after work?

FLO
No.

Raj turns to Charles.

RAJ
See there? Right to the point and everyone knows where they stand.

CHARLES
Okay. Ellie, what do you say to just you and me tomorrow night?

ELLIE
Why bother? Let's just have our disappointing first date right here and get it over with.

CHARLES

Technically, we had that yesterday. And I didn't find it so disappointing. And you came back too, didn't you? So clearly we're on the same page.

His smart phone PINGS. He checks the message.

ELLIE

Yeah, I can see you're riveted on me.

CHARLES

What do you mean?

ELLIE

You just checked your cell phone to see if someone better was texting you.

CHARLES

I did not. It was just an automatic reflex.

Ellie's phone PINGS. She steals a glance at it.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

I saw that. You checked.

ELLIE

Only because you did.

CHARLES

Let's start over. Where were we? Oh, yeah, our exciting second date. The one where we kiss.

He leans in suggestively. She pushes him back.

ELLIE

We have a lot of awkward silences to get through first. The kiss comes way later.

CHARLES

Not that much later. I'm thinking during the Hansom ride through Central Park.

ELLIE

More likely we'll take separate cabs and head in opposite directions.

CHARLES

No way. I'm not that kind of guy. I'd see you home. And to thank me, you'd probably invite me up for a drink. I'd accept.

ELLIE

I see where this is going. It's always about sex.

CHARLES

Not so. At least not until our fourth or fifth date.

ELLIE

Whatever. Sooner or later, we'd end up in bed and it would become chatter on a social network about how the sex wasn't any good.

CHARLES

How would they know it wasn't any good?

KATE

They just do. In the cyber world, they always know. One little misstep in bed and you're tagged as a lousy lay. In a nanosecond, your reputation's out the window.

JAMES

I read about that actually happening to someone. Wasn't that you, Raj?

RAJ

No, that wasn't me. I'm never bad in bed. I'm being unfairly maligned because of some sexual incompetent who happens to have my name.

CHARLES

Ignore him. Let's dance.

He grabs her arm and escorts her to the small crowded dance area.

INT. PIT-STOP BAR DANCE FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Charles and Ellie dance apart at first, then closer and closer. Then real close.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Know what, Ellie? I think I'm ready to be exclusive.

ELLIE

You can't be serious. We just met.

CHARLES

Maybe, but I know you're the one.

ELLIE

This is getting way out of my comfort zone.

She pushes away. He pulls her back.

CHARLES

Oh, it is, huh? Then why did you come to New York?

ELLIE

How do you know I'm not from here?

CHARLES

Trust me. New Yorkers only discuss their comfort zones with their analysts.

ELLIE

Oh.

CHARLES

My best guess is rural Iowa.

ELLIE

Kate must have told you.

CHARLES

Nope. Good old Harvard linguistics. Anyway, that's beside the point. You wouldn't be here if you weren't ready for an adventure.

ELLIE

Adventure yes, sleazy pickup no.

CHARLES

If there's anything I am not, it's sleazy. On the other hand, I'm ready for something wild and crazy. Let's think of an adventure and do it together.

ELLIE
Like what?

CHARLES
Let me think.

He suddenly drops to one knee in the middle of the dance floor, clutching her hand.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Ellie ... What's your last name?

ELLIE
Henderson.

CHARLES
Ellie Henderson. Will you marry me?

Ellie snatches her hand away.

ELLIE
Whoa. That's not an adventure.
You're talking about a life-
altering decision.

CHARLES
Exactly.

ELLIE
It's outrageous.

CHARLES
That's what I love about it.

ELLIE
That's what I don't love about it.

CHARLES
It's going to turn out great.

ELLIE
Or not.

CHARLES
There's no sure thing in life,
Ellie. We could know each other ten
years before getting married and
still end up divorced.

The entire populous of the Pit-Stop Bar chants: "DO IT ... DO IT ... DO IT!"

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