

The Real Final Exam: The Bechdel Test

By

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It's graduation day at East High. The balloons have fallen, the diplomas have been handed out, the caps have been thrown. There are crumpled and dirty graduation day programs littering the ground, and a janitor is discarding used cigars and empty beer bottles from behind the bleachers. TROY, 18, is a brown-haired, blue-eyed, tall attractive man. He is the indecisive, goofy captain of the basketball team whom everyone loves. He's chatting with his girlfriend, GABRIELLA, a short, smart, shy, friendly Latina with dark brown hair and dimples who hates confrontation, and her best friend TAYLOR, a witty and driven black woman who doesn't take flack from anyone and probably should've been valedictorian. She is also 18.

TROY

Thank God that's over. I didn't even write that speech, you know that? That nerd hip-hopping nerd Martha wrote it for me. Why was I allowed to give a speech? I wasn't class president or valedictorian, I was a horrible student.

Across the auditorium is SHARPAY, 18, a blonde young woman who loves wearing pink and heels and lives (and probably would die) for the theatre. She watches the three in disgust. She drops her diploma and yearbook in an empty seat, whips her glittery, magenta graduation cap off her head, clenches her right fist, and stomps towards the trio.

TAYLOR

I feel like it was white male privilege? Your dad was the coach of the basketball team, which for four whole years took precedence over anything else that this school accomplished in other fields, specifically academics?

In a pause, Troy appears so seriously consider what Taylor has said.

TROY

... Nah, that can't be it. Alright, Gab, our dinner reservations are at 6:30, so we should be on the road within the next 10 minutes. I'm gonna go get the car, then it's goodbye, high school.

GABRIELLA

Okay, babe. I'll be here.

Troy jogs towards the parking lot, stumbling over his robes. Taylor and Gabriella continue to reminisce about high school, when Sharpay storms over, heels clicking.

GABRIELLA

Hey, Sharpay! Happy gradua-

Gabriella's smile and sentence are cut off by Sharpay's slap to her face. Taylor stands, frozen. Gabriella's smile breaks immediately.

GABRIELLA

You psycho bitch! What was that for?!

SHARPAY

Oh, I'm the psycho bitch? That's real funny, Gabriella!

The girls scream in each other's faces. A janitor and the principal run towards them, following the sound of the argument. Taylor snaps out of her shock, grabs Sharpay by her sleeve and Gabriella by her Honor Society cords, dragging them out via the back door.

GABRIELLA

Taylor, you better let me go-

SHARPAY

Taylor, keep your goddamn hands off of me I swear to Go-

TAYLOR

Hey! Dumbasses! We almost just got caught fighting. It's the last day we have to be on these premises, and you two idiots almost got us in trouble.

Taylor finds an empty classroom, and shoves them in. She closes the door behind her, closes her eyes, and breathes deeply.

TAYLOR

Okay.

Taylor opens her eyes, and turns to Sharpay, who is standing across the room with her arms crossed and "I will strangle you without hesitation" eyes.

TAYLOR
Guys, what the fuck?

Sharpay immediately turns to Gabriella.

SHARPAY
Yeah, Gabriella, what the fuck?

Gabriella's eyes widen and she opens her mouth, about to start screaming again, but Taylor cuts in.

TAYLOR
Sharpay- don't try to twist this.
Both of you are acting like
animals. What is your problem?

GABRIELLA
I mean, *I* don't have a problem with
Sharpay, other than the fact that
she's a psychopath who has it out
for me for some reason- she always
has.

Sharpay laughs angrily.

SHARPAY
"Some reason," she says. Hilarious,
Gab. Don't be stupid. Don't play
the victim. You know what you've
done to me.

Gabriella, getting angrier, begins to speak faster.

GABRIELLA
What? What? What? What, Sharpay?
What could I have possibly done to
you? You have everything. Money, a
job out of high schoo-

Sharpay cuts Gabriella off, speaking even faster.

SHARPAY
What, coming back to my alma mater
that operates on the local tax
revenue of Albuquerque to help with
their grotesquely underfunded drama
department? Give me a break. The
graduation rate in our district is
61.7 percent. Kids are barely
graduating, do you really think
that they're singing and dancing
and acting instead? Public schools
barely pay the goddamn teachers

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SHARPAY (cont'd)
 here so it's not like they'll pay
 me. Right. A "job".

Taylor looks at Sharpay, mouth agape at her knowledge of the Albuquerque public school system and its nuance. Sharpay doesn't shift her focus from Gabriella.

SHARPAY
 You're missing the entire point.
 It's not about whether I have money
 or not, it's tha-

GABRIELLA
 Don't lecture me, Sharpay. You have
 had every opportunity. My mom is a
 single parent, and with a
 one-parent income, my chances of
 finding higher education that I
 could afford was almost
 nonexistent. And being a Latina?
 Stanford's affirmative action
 policies saved me, and gave me a
 future outside of this wasteland.

Taylor nods in agreement at Gabriella's argument.

GABRIELLA
 You trust fund, country club baby,
 on the other hand, will probably
 land right on your Jimmy Choos and
 still get farther than me in life.
 The only "opportunity" I "took from
 you" was your pointless crush on
 Troy. Just be honest, is this whole
 mess about Troy? Are you jealous?

Taylor stops nodding her head and shakes her head furiously, hoping Gabriella will take her ignorant comment back. Sharpay's eyes widen to the point where she thinks she might pop a blood vessel.

SHARPAY
 I cannot-

Gabriella's purse begins to sing out Troy and Gabriella's duet of "What I've Been Looking For". She steals a quick glance at her phone, which is illuminated with Troy's smiling face. She holds up a finger at Sharpay and answers.

GABRIELLA
 Hey, Troy!

Gabriella shoots a glare at Sharpay.

GABRIELLA

You're where? Okay. Yeah. Yup. No. I'll be out soon. Hey- hey- honey? Hi. Yes, listen. I'm in the middle of something right now. Can I call you back? It shouldn't take long, it's pretty stupid. Okay. Yup. Yes. Okay. I- I don't know. Just dribble a basketball in the parking lot or something. Where's Chad? Go find Chad.

Taylor looks alarmed at the sound of her own boyfriend's name. She mutters to herself under her breath.

TAYLOR

Where *is* Chad?

Gabriella finishes up with Troy, puts her phone away, and turns back to Sharpay, who is looking back at her in disbelief.

SHARPAY

Are you... kidding me? Nope. Not doing this. Not spelling this out for you. Gabriella, you can choke. Taylor, get out of the way.

Sharpay marches towards the door, and Taylor stumbles to beat Sharpay to the door to block her exit. However, Sharpay's wearing heels for the entirety of high school gave her experience that Taylor cannot match. Sharpay exits into the hallway.

TAYLOR

Sharpay! Hold on! Stop!

Sharpay whips around and begins to yell when the janitor turns the corner and sees the three girls in the hallway.

JANITOR

Hey, girls! No way you're supposed to still be in the building, do you want me to-

Taylor pushes Gabriella and Sharpay down the hall, running away from the janitor. She tries several doors along the hallway, until she finds an open one. She pulls her friends into a dark room. The three are silent until Sharpay begins to speak again, her voice lowered to a scary decibel and slowed to a drawl. Her voice drips with disbelief and black anger.

SHARPAY

You think... that I am this
upset... over your boyfriend... who
has half the stage presence of
Lin-Manuel Miranda and half the
ball skill of Steph Curry yet twice
the ego of both...?

Taylor finds the light switch at the end of Sharpay's question. They're in the school's theatre. Sharpay is standing center stage. Her gaze is frozen on Gabriella. Taylor shoots Gabriella a look of fear, furiously shakes her head. Gabriella realizes the error of her ways.

GABRIELLA

Okay, okay, okay. So it's not Troy.
That's my bad.

Sharpay's voice does not change.

SHARPAY

Don't you ever suggest such a thing
ever again. I liked him when I was
16, but my ambitions stretch much
farther beyond boys at this point.

Taylor snaps and nods in agreement. Gabriella shoots her a look.

GABRIELLA

Taylor, you aren't helping.

SHARPAY

I don't want to explain something
to you that I know you understand,
yet you refuse to acknowledge it.
You're so good at pretending, at
acting. Maybe you should've gone to
Tisch, or *Juliard*.

A silence falls upon the room again. Gabriella's phone dings with messages from Troy who is still waiting in the car. She quickly answers him to placate him. Taylor looks to the door as she thinks she hears shoes clicking down the hallway towards them. Gabriella's voice softens as she takes a seat in the front row of the audience.

GABRIELLA

So that's what this is about.
Sharpay... I hope that this doesn't
come across as condescending, but
it's not my fault that you didn't
get the Juliard scholarship.

Sharpay begins to scream in frustration again. Taylor jumps.

SHARPAY

Oh. My. *GOD*. You really think that everything is about you, don't you? I never said-

Taylor sees a shadow pass by underneath the door and aggressively shushes the girls. Sharpay continues speaking, changing her voice to a harsh whisper, not missing a beat.

SHARPAY

-that you were the reason for my current future, but you took so much opportunity away from me up until this point.

Gabriella pauses for a moment before speaking.

GABRIELLA

Opportunity? Sharpay, you're a talented singer and actress, how did my existence change that? I was just trying to get by, too.

SHARPAY

You didn't change me, personally, but you and your boyfriend Joseph Gordon Hayward's upheaval of the status quo, while great for the growth of our student body, also ruined my performance legitimacy.

Gabriella is silent. Taylor looks back and forth between the two girls, trying to read their facial expressions and body language.

SHARPAY

I was seen as a bitch just because I was passionate and good at theatre, like Troy was with basketball. A fun sexist double standard that everyone just let happen for four years. Until Mr. Basketball and you came along and made it "cool", theatre was the most ridiculed program here. Every performance opportunity that arose after you came to Albuquerque? You and your innocent inexperience took them from me.

Taylor nods along, really considering what Sharpay is saying, which she never did in high school. Gabriella's voice gets high-pitched and defensive.

GABRIELLA

You were a total diva! You need to share the stage, it's not like it was *your* drama department. Like sophomore year, you tried to stop Troy and me from being able to audition to be a part of the show!

SHARPAY

I *suggested* that you and Troy audition for smaller roles because I've been trained in this since I was a child, and you've never been in a musical. You even had the nerve to show up late to your call time! If you wanted to be a part of the drama club so badly, one would think that you would take it seriously, which you didn't.

Gabriella opens her mouth to defend herself, but cannot get a word in edgewise.

SHARPAY

Then you had the gall to do it a *second* time during your decathlon. Also, Gabriella - were you not aware that you have a insane amount of stage fright? You stalled for a solid two minutes before you even sang a note in "Breaking Free", which is a pretty good indicator of whether or not someone should be on stage.

GABRIELLA

I was new, I was scared of you, and Troy, he-

"What I've Been Looking For" begins to play from Gabriella's purse again. She quickly rejects Troy's call and sends him a brief text instead, so that she can get back to explaining herself, but Sharpay cuts in.

SHARPAY

Not to mention that you won the academic decathlon, Troy won his game, and you both got the roles that should've belonged to Ryan and

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SHARPAY (cont'd)
 me. And what did I do? I shut my
 fucking mouth and I sang about
 being all in this together with you
 horrible little people and went
 home.

TAYLOR
 Gab, you've hurt Sharpay in a way
 that you didn't even realize. And I
 think I get what she's saying. You
 should apologize for betraying her
 like that, that's not-

SHARPAY
 Hold on, now, Taylor. You literally
 tried to break her and her
 boyfriend up for your nerd
 competition. Don't get holier than
 thou on us here.

Gabriella's eyes widen, remembering the major conflict of
 her spring semester of sophomore year. Her phone rings
 again. Taylor shifts her weight between her feet, appearing
 unsettled.

TAYLOR
 Hey now- le- let- l- let's not drag
 me through this mud. I'm just the
 mediator.

SHARPAY
 No, no, no. Let's talk about it.
 Remember sophomore year? You
 stirred the pot to get Gabby here
 to break up with Troy so that she
 could focus on the academic
 decathlon, remember that?

TAYLOR
 Yeah, okay, but we all apologized
 and everything worked out. Everyone
 won their respective contests!

GABRIELLA
 Taylor, that was insanely
 manipulative. You really didn't
 want me and Troy to be together for
 the longest time. You said I would
 never understand him because I
 didn't "speak cheerleader". What
 was that about? Trying to keep me
 apart from Troy and devaluing women

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GABRIELLA (cont'd)
at the same time. Do you think
we're in an ethnically diverse
version of *Grease* or something?
Where's the feminism?

Taylor folds her arms, narrows her eyes, and snaps back.

TAYLOR
Okay, back off. My parents push me
because I have to work twice as
hard as someone like you-

SHARPAY
Someone white?

TAYLOR
Yes, Caucasian - just to get the
same results. I have worked my ass
off at this school. You didn't
think I wanted to be a cheerleader?
Be in a musical? I couldn't. That
was never going to be me. And you
know what sucks? People don't
acknowledge or remember the
contributions that the decathlon
team has brought to this
godforsaken school, and I never got
to do any of the things I really
wanted to while I was here. I'll
admit that the defense mechanism of
sarcastic humor was a cheap shot,
and I'm sorry.

GABRIELLA
Wow. I never knew that you were
under this kind of stress, Tay,
race being tethered to every
decision you make, action you take,
and word you say. I thought you
just really loved decathlon. And
even though I'm Latina, I'm white
passing, so I can't even begin to
speak to your experiences. Sorry.

SHARPAY
Damn. I never thought about it like
that before. Sorry for being so
insensitive and harping on that.

TAYLOR
Thanks, guys. Sharpay.

Taylor motions to Sharpay to keep on. Sharpay begins to speak quickly and angrily again. Once again, Gabriella's phone begins to ring, but Sharpay continues to talk over it. Gabriella turns her ringer off.

SHARPAY

Then in the summer, right? I work so hard on the summer showcase at my parent's country club, and you come out of actual nowhere, again, and had me outed from my own show. Again. You turned my brother against me, which was really hard for me because he's my twin, best friend, and partner. But you didn't care. You left, but then, *then* you come back to get back together with Troy and show me up in front of those talent scouts, all in the same 3 minute song. Do you care about anyone other than yourself?

GABRIELLA

But you still won that awar-

SHARPAY

No shit I won the award, are you kidding me? It's a show that I put on and perform in year1- that's not the *point*, Gabriella.

Sharpay takes a deep breath, and lowers her voice. She realizes that she won't get through to Gabriella by screaming at her like a misbehaved child. She softens.

SHARPAY

Senior year, you convinced every living and breathing cell who roams these halls to join the show, only for you to bail. You just left the musical to go to Stanford in the middle of the year, leaving me to handle that mess. I had to step in for you and sing alongside Troy's under-experienced understudy because he crossed various state lines to chase you, and I-

Gabriella's phone begins to violently buzz and glow with Troy's smiling face on it again. Sharpay becomes tense and annoyed.

SHARPAY

Go ahead. Answer it. Jesus Christ.

Gabriella thinks for a moment, and looks to an irritated Sharpay and a disapproving Taylor. She rejects Troy's call and turns her phone over. Sharpay's shoulders relax, but her wrinkled forehead and hard frown remain.

SHARPAY

Like I was saying, I had to fight off my rat of an assistant from stealing my own role, only for you to come running down the wings hand in hand with your man to "save the show".

Sharpay takes on a mocking tone.

SHARPAY

"The sweethearts are back! Back to the wings, Sharpay! Thanks for playing two roles!"

GABRIELLA

I'm really sorry, Sharpay. I never thought of you as anything but a thorn in my side, and I tried so hard to maximize on my own happiness that I didn't realize that I was taking away from yours.

SHARPAY

Zero-sum game.

TAYLOR

Damn, girl, econ too? You really do know your stuff. We could've used you on the decathlon team.

SHARPAY

I'm just glad that you're seeing where I'm coming from, Gabriella. I didn't want to leave here without having gotten this stuff off of my chest. It's not healthy for me to harbor this resentment as I try to move forward both in my personal and professional growth.

GABRIELLA

That's fair. And I think that we were all able to get some grievances off of our chests, too.

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GABRIELLA (cont'd)

This was good. I don't want to lose you guys as friends just because we failed to communicate over these past few years.

TAYLOR

Yeah. If anything like this bubbles up again, I would much rather you tell me straight up than almost get into a fist fight. Honestly, you still scare me a little, Sharpay. You look like you could and would knock someone unconscious with a tap shoe.

SHARPAY

There's no way to prove that I haven't already.

Sharpay stomps and lunges in Taylor's direction, causing her to flinch and scream. The girls giggle (Taylor giggles nervously) when MS. DARBUS, the school's drama teacher, having heard Taylor's scream, enters the theatre from the back of the house.

MS. DARBUS

Miss Montez, Miss McKessie, Miss Evans, are my eyes deceiving me? I know that you are not supposed to be on the premises anymore, as you are now former students of East High.

The girls giggle, say goodbye to Ms. Darbus, link arms, and head out into the hallway towards the parking lot to leave East High.

TAYLOR

Guys. Did we just pass the Bechdel test?

SHARPAY

Yeah, I guess so. Except we mentioned Troy a few times. But we got very close.

GABRIELLA

"Joseph Gordon Hayward". That was *funny*.