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STEPHANIE RENEE FOSNIGHT

When Austen's Heroines Meet A Play in One Act

STEPHANIE RENEE FOSNIGHT

THE COLLEGE OF ST. CATHERINE

FIRST PERFORMED MARCH 14, 2001 AT THE COLLEGE OF ST. CATHERINE

PRINCIPAL CAST

(in order of appearance):

ELIZABETH BENNET: Clara Burgert
EMMA WOODHOUSE: Stacy Anderson
CATHERINE MORLAND: Ida Roth
ANNE ELLIOT: Deanna LaValle
MARIANNE DASHWOOD: Melinda Grundhauser

SECONDARY CAST

(to be played by members of principal cast):

ELINOR BRANDON: Stacy Anderson
MRS. BENNET: Stacy Anderson
CAROLINE BINGLEY: Melinda Grundhauser
GEORGIANA DARCY: Ida Roth
MRS. WESTON: Ida Roth
BLAKE: Deanna LaValle
MRS. SPENCER: Stacy Anderson
MRS. ALLEN: Deanna LaValle
LADY ELEANOR STAVELY: Clara Burgert
SUSAN HARRIS: Melinda Grundhauser

SETTING: The ladies' parlour of a wayside inn in —shire, England. Sometime in the early 1800s. A sofa, three chairs and two small tables are grouped companionably before the upstage fireplace with mantel. A door stage right leads to the garden and a door to the left leads into the inn.

NOTE: During the dream sequences, the major character plays an older version of herself while the other ladies don small accessories and play the other characters in the dream. The furniture is slightly rearranged to suggest a different room.

WHEN AUSTEN'S HEROINES MEET

ELIZABETH [*enters, calling over her shoulder to the passageway*]: Do not trouble yourself about me, my dear aunt. I prefer to rest before continuing on our journey. Pray, enjoy your walk. [*She settles herself on the chair center right.*]

EMMA [*enters, arms full of parcels, which she deposits on chair next to ELIZABETH. Starts to sit then realizes chair is full with packages. Jumping up.*]: Oh! [*crosses to sofa and sits*]

CATHERINE [*enters with ANNE*]: I cannot wait to return to Bath, my dear Miss Elliot! It is a place of such happy memories to me. [*stands before fire*]

ANNE: I must admit, Miss Morland, that it does improve upon acquaintance. [*sits next to EMMA on sofa*]

[*Silence. MARIANNE bursts in from garden, windblown and disheveled. She looks wildly about her, staggers and faints. The other four women run to her.*]

ANNE [*bending over MARIANNE and taking off her bonnet*]: Have any of you smelling salts?

EMMA [*fishing out a package and handing it to ANNE*]: They have just been purchased. Perhaps the strength will revive her sooner.

[*MARIANNE is revived by the salts and is helped by ANNE and EMMA to the sofa.*]

CATHERINE: Do not worry. You are among friends, and we wish to help you. What can be the sad event that would cause you to arrive so unexpectedly and all alone?

[*MARIANNE begins to weep.*]

ELIZABETH: Will you not tell us what distresses you? We need not stand on the ceremony of introduction now. My name is Miss Elizabeth Bennet, and I have four sisters, so you see I am quite used to receiving confidences.

CATHERINE [*to Anne*]: Can't you do something, Miss Morland? She might faint again.

ANNE [*to the others*]: She might speak more comfortably if she felt she knew us. I am Anne Elliot, and I am journeying from my father's house in Bath.

CATHERINE: Oh, and my name is Catherine. Catherine Morland, and I am returning home from a fortnight's excursion in Bath.

EMMA: I see that leaves me. I am Miss Emma Woodhouse, and our estate is in Highbury. I am quite used to nursing my father, who is an invalid, and I have often noticed a distinct connection between one's spirits and one's health. If you would but share your burden with us, my dear girl, we might help you. I think you should find us very sympathetic souls.

MARIANNE [*shakily*]: I see it is no use to trifle with such determined good angels any longer. My name is Marianne Dashwood, and I am about to be married. [*Falls back on the couch with exhaustion.*]

EMMA: But this is news of the very best kind! I myself am about to be married, which is the occasion for my shopping today, and I fail to understand why it has thrown you into such a melancholy disposition.

MARIANNE: Of course you do not understand. Not one of you can have suffered the pangs of misfortune and disappointed love as have I. I, who was so happy not thirty-six hours ago! If you understood the true nature of my complaint you would no longer question my running away!

CATHERINE: You have run away? How did you come so far alone? I did not notice you in the last coach, at least.

MARIANNE: I have traveled by coach since leaving Devonshire, but I grew fearful of discovery at such a central stopping place as this and walked from the last town. It was a distance of five miles, maybe less.

EMMA: My poor child! To have walked so far on such a day! But really it was quite foolish of you. What will your family think?

MARIANNE: I left a letter for my sister Elinor, explaining that I could never marry Colonel Brandon. But two days ago I thought I might, but then I had a dream of the most ... it was of the most awful purport! You must understand, ladies, that the Colonel is not my first love. No, there was another before him, a young man of passionate and tender ways. I loved him with my whole being, and it seemed to me that he felt the same. But my mother and sisters and I are poor, left at the mercy of an indolent half-brother, and Willoughby deserted me for a Miss Grey with fifty thousand pounds. I would not have believed him so false, ladies and yet... [*she begins to sob quietly*]

ELIZABETH [*becoming interested in the tale despite herself*]: Now, Miss Dashwood, you have stated that this false young man is not the one you are about to marry. What of the second young man? Do not you love him?

MARIANNE: Aye! I do love the colonel completely, though he is not a young man. He is the opposite of the deceitful Willoughby in all particulars of style and manner, and I admit I care for him with a love more steadfast than ever I held for Willoughby. I would say even that I love him with a passion more intense. And yet ... my dream. It was that which convinced me I could not marry Colonel Brandon.

ANNE [*very gently*]: What of this dream, my friend? What was it that frightened you so as to leave behind your friends and family and to stake all your fortunes on a journey so wild and uncertain?

MARIANNE [*colouring*]: Well, you see, I have always been rather proud of myself for the intensity of my feeling. My sister Elinor is constantly telling me I must attain more sense and less sensibility. Yet the romance of nature, of love, and of life has been such a central part of my person for as long as I can remember, and if I were to lose my particular passionate nature, then I could not continue. It was the wretched dream that showed me that I might have a most frightening future before me.

Lights fade while set is rearranged and characters are altered. First dream sequence begins.

The sitting room of Mrs. Marianne Brandon. She appears to be in her mid-thirties, is wearing a cap and is sewing something sensible.

WHEN AUSTEN'S HEROINES MEET

ELINOR BRANDON [*enters holding a copy of Shakespeare's sonnets. She is 17.*]:
'Betwixt mine eye and heart a league is took.'

MARIANNE [*not looking up*]: What, my love?

ELINOR [*wanders dreamily about the room as she recites in an exaggeratedly dramatic tone*]: 'Betwixt mine eye and heart a league is took.' Hmm...a league. [*pulls dictionary from shelf and looks up "league."*] "A unit of distance equal to three miles." [*refers again to sonnets*] 'Betwixt mine eye and heart a league is took, and each doth good turns now unto the other: When that mine eye is famish'd for a look.' Famished. Famishéd. Yes, famishéd. 'When that mine eye is famishéd for a look, or heart in love with sighs himself doth smother, with my love's picture then my eye doth feast, and to the painted banquet bids my heart; and other time mine eye is my heart's guest, And in his thoughts of love doth share a part.'

MARIANNE has not been paying any attention to her daughter. ELINOR walks up to her and snatches the cushion on the sofa next to her mother.

ELINOR: Mama! 'When that mine eye is famishéd for a look, or heart in love with sighs himself doth smother.' [*On "smother" ELINOR covers her face with the cushion to smother herself, and falls limply onto the sofa*]. Would not I make a convincing Desdemona, my dear Mama?

MARIANNE: [*looking up at last and annoyed with the interruption*]: Elinor! Have you practiced the pianoforte this afternoon? Did your father find you? He wanted you to read to him. And have you decided what you are going to wear to the ball tonight? You know it is most important that you look your most beautiful. Mr. James will be there, and you know he has twenty-five thousand pounds a year!

ELINOR: Mama! You know that I cannot abide Mr. James. He is so common and sensible. I could not marry a man with whom I was not violently in love, and whose taste did not in every point coincide with my own. [*returning to her book of sonnets*]: And my husband must pronounce with feeling those words which have nearly driven me wild. 'Betwixt mine eye and heart a league is took, and each—

MARIANNE [*interrupting*]: Elinor! Where do you find such ideas? Can you not yet distinguish between reality and dreams at the age of 17? When I was a girl I was full of romantic sensibilities, but I soon learned that they were only idle dreams unlikely to please oneself or to even come true. And do you not see what a comfortable, secure life I have led with your sensible father? Had I married my first love, I would be badly off indeed, my child. It is my duty as your mother to teach you to have sense. It is for your own good, my love. [*MARIANNE pauses and surveys her daughter. She wets her thumb with her tongue and carefully scrubs at a spot on ELINOR's chin while ELINOR stands grumpily. She then examines her daughter's bosom, and demonstratively plumps up her own front. Her daughter follows suit, but with a thunderstorm brewing on her face.*] Now do go upstairs and make yourself your most charming for Mr. James. He will be sure to dance with you all evening.

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MARIANNE returns to her sewing looking no less placid. ELINOR looks at her in shocked astonishment before bursting into tears and quitting the room, throwing the book of sonnets aside as she does so.

Light change as set returns to inn. Characters return to normal, lights come up on the five arranged exactly as they were before the sequence.

MARIANNE is quietly weeping once again. ANNE is holding her hand and trying to comfort her. ELIZABETH is looking very much as if she would like to laugh. CATHERINE is awed, and EMMA actually chuckles.

EMMA: Do you mean to say that you actually ran away from an advantageous marriage to a man whom you love, leaving the assistance of all your friends and connections, merely because you had a dream?

MARIANNE: Oh, but surely you understand the implications of my dream, Miss Woodhouse!

EMMA [*kindly, but very practically*]: I am afraid that I cannot attempt to sympathize with such foolishness.

MARIANNE: Did not then the true nature of the dream impress you with its gruesomeness? Can you not now understand why I am loath to marry a sensible man?

ANNE (*kindly*): I think I begin to understand, my dear Miss Dashwood. In the vision of your daughter you saw yourself, and your behavior to her was a frightening caricature of what you might one day become.

MARIANNE: Oh, yes, you do understand, Miss Elliot. I cannot bear to become a creature of such practicality. To be so unsympathetic towards my own daughter, when I myself have been nearly drowned in the throes of passionate reflection and romantic considerations is a calamity indeed!

EMMA [*sarcastically*]: Indeed!

CATHERINE: And this is why you ran away?

ELIZABETH: Surely there is a less dramatic way of approaching your fears, Miss Dashwood. I would be ashamed to cause such worry to my family, and especially to pain my Mr. Darcy in such a fashion.

CATHERINE: Pray, who is Mr. Darcy?

ELIZABETH [*stiffly*]: Although, to my friends, I am known for my vivacity, I am reticent to discuss personal matters before strangers.

ANNE: Well, you see, Miss Bennet, we are not quite strangers in this room now. For the sake of Miss Dashwood, I think it would be agreeable if we offered her the best advice we can draw from our own experience.

ELIZABETH: If I must, then, I will tell you about Mr. Darcy. He is the man to whom I am engaged, and we are to be married in a few short months, on the same day that his friend, Mr. Bingley, and my sister Jane, pledge their vows to each other. I became acquainted with Mr. Darcy through his friend Bingley and-

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CATHERINE [*gushing*]: I suppose you and Mr. Darcy were immediately attracted to one another, and that your sister and yourself enjoyed delightfully simultaneous courtships. How romantic! That must tempt your imagination especially, my dear Miss Marianne.

ELIZABETH [*laughing*]: Indeed, that is not quite the way our betrothal came about. In fact, Mr. Darcy and I hated each other on first sight. He snubbed me because he was bored at the country ball at which we met, disdainful of our rural amusements for the city pleasures to which he had been accustomed. I took his apparent pride to be quite insulting.

MARIANNE: Really? How did you at last become reconciled?

ELIZABETH: I must admit that it was through no virtue of my own. I determined to despise Mr. Darcy thoroughly for his pride, and I constructed for myself a satisfyingly bad character of him. It was rather an embarrassing shock to learn that he was indeed a gentleman of upstanding character and achievement and also of great kindness.

EMMA: And how did you discover his true merits, if you were so decidedly set against him? Your Mr. Darcy is the owner of Pemberley, is he not? I have been often in Derbyshire and I have seen his extensive house and grounds. No doubt your family was in great hurry to help you along to such a wealthy man, especially as you have sisters. How many are there in your family, did you say?

ELIZABETH: There are four sisters, besides myself, and no brothers to inherit the family estate. But I would not say that my family was useful in endearing me to Mr. Darcy. Or, I did not think so at first. In all honesty I must reveal that they were quite an embarrassment at first, excepting my dear sister Jane, in all matters of propriety and gentle upbringing. But in the course of a year I learned to love Mr. Darcy for the amiable gentleman he truly is, and in return he overcame his prejudiced opinions toward my family, even displaying his own attachment to me through his attentions to them.

CATHERINE: And is all now settled happily between your connections and his?

ELIZABETH: I must confess to an unfortunate incident involving my youngest sister which threatened to forever ruin our happiness, but I am now assured of his steadfast love for me, which cannot be affected by the impropriety of my sister or my mother.

MARIANNE: How lucky you are, Miss Bennet, to be so steadfast in your expectation of happiness. Have you no doubts at all?

ELIZABETH: I am determined to be happy, Miss Dashwood. I will be with the man I love, and he loves me. Is that not enough?

EMMA: But what if this youngest sister you speak of were to embarrass the family again? Could his love for you withstand even that? Knowing the social position of Mr. Darcy as I do, I cannot help noticing that you will be occupying a very significant role in society. You would not want anything to impair the reputation of your husband, would you?

ELIZABETH: You speak with such audacity, madam! Your presuming upon my suitability to be the mistress of the estate of Pemberley insults me. I am certain that my sister will not come to visit me. The only possible embarrassment would be a visit from my mother, who is unfortunately a silly woman. And I am not without hope that her behavior might be amended in time.

EMMA: Are you so certain of this?

ELIZABETH [*sounding anything but certain*]: Why, assuredly. If my mother were to embarrass me at Pemberley I would ... I would ... Perhaps I might convince her of my own ideas of propriety. Although, it is the determined belief in the merit of my own opinions which has damaged me before. [*haltingly*] Upon reflection, I must say that I am somewhat unsure as how to refute your fearful suggestions.

MARIANNE: How can you censure me so for my fear if you carry it yourself?

ELIZABETH: Oh, but I am not afraid of becoming overly sensible. I am sure that if I laugh enough all will be well.

EMMA: But what if you are not the one who is laughing, but who becomes instead the object of laughter? It might be worthy to consider it, Miss Bennet.

Light change, set change for second dream sequence.

MRS. ELIZABETH DARCY and her sister-in-law, GEORGIANA DARCY, are sitting with MRS. BENNET and MISS CAROLINE BINGLEY in a Pemberley parlour. It is about one year after ELIZABETH'S marriage. MISS BINGLEY has just sat down.

ELIZABETH [*cooly*]: Good morning, Miss Bingley.

MRS. BENNET [*quite effusively*]: Ah, Miss Bingley! What a pleasure it is to see you. I do not believe we have met since your brother married my daughter Jane.

MISS BINGLEY: [*barely civil*]: How do you do, Mrs. Bennet? [*turns to Miss Darcy*]: My dear Georgiana! It has been ages since we met in town last, has it not? How do you get on with your music?

GEORGIANA: I practice often, Caroline, though I fear it is not enough.

ELIZABETH: Surely you recall, Miss Bingley, how modestly my dear sister-in-law so values her abilities. Georgiana practices constantly, and it is my firm belief that she has improved vastly since I came to Pemberley one year ago.

MRS. BENNET: A year? Surely not, Lizzie. Can it have been that long since I parted with you and dear Jane? Perhaps I have not noticed the length, if it has indeed been so long, because I have been so felicitous since your marriages. Such an advantageous match you have made, my love. Mr. Darcy is ever so much richer than Mr. Bingley, even!

ELIZABETH: [*looking significantly at Miss Bingley*]: Mama!

MRS. BENNET: Oh, there is no need to quiet me, Lizzie. I am sure both Caroline and Georgiana know exactly how much money their brothers have, and there is no shame in admitting that Mr. Darcy gets ever so many more pounds a year than does Mr. Bingley.

MISS BINGLEY [*cuttingly*]: How does your youngest daughter get on, Mrs. Bennet? Her marriage to Mr. Wickham was rather fortunate, if not quite so advantageous, was it not?

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ELIZABETH: Perhaps we should not—

MRS. BENNET: Oh, do not concern yourself with my feelings, Lizzie. I have no qualms in speaking of my dear Lydia. Wickham may not be as rich as Bingley or Darcy, but he makes up for the lack in good humour. Besides, I am certain that he loves Lydia most violently. Why else would he persuade her to run away with him like he did? I always knew that such youthful enthusiasm was not to be condemned. They were married shortly after, and even Miss Bingley cannot deny that it has turned out well. My darling Lydia is still the most popular girl among the officers in the North, from all accounts, though she be a married woman. If Miss Bingley is scornful of Lydia, I am sure that it is only jealousy. *Lydia*, at least, has a husband. [*looks significantly at the astonished Miss Bingley*]

ELIZABETH [*desperately*]: Mama, did you not say you wished to see the kitchen garden? I am sure it is free now of servants. Georgiana can entertain our guest.

ELIZABETH propels MRS. BENNET out of the room before MISS BINGLEY regains her powers of speech. They have barely exited when MISS BINGLEY begins to sputter.

MISS BINGLEY: Such impudence! Such low breeding! I am repulsed and insulted, Georgiana!

GEORGIANA [*anxiously*]: My dear Caroline, calm yourself. You will make yourself ill.

MISS BINGLEY [*continuing*]: To think that the daughter of such a creature is now the mistress of Pemberley! The very thought is repugnant. Your brother has been utterly deceived, and has thrown himself away on a family that is not only beneath our notice but is also worthy of our censure! I cannot believe the abominable pride of that woman. To accuse *me* of being unable to “get a husband” while congratulating herself on the fact that her daughter had to run away with a man and live with him before he could be persuaded to marry her! Georgiana, how can you tolerate such low company?

MISS DARCY: My dear Caroline, you must not concern yourself with me. I think my sister Elizabeth the kindest and loveliest wife imaginable for my brother, and I have been infinitely more happy since they were married and she became my companion at Pemberley.

MISS BINGLEY [*quite sarcastically*]: Of course I cannot expect anything else from a Darcy when speaking of Elizabeth Bennet. I had forgotten how thoroughly she has managed to deceive both of you. But Georgiana, can you honestly defend that mother of hers? Especially after such a display as we have been treated to today?

MISS DARCY: Elizabeth cannot help her mother. And I know that she is embarrassed by Mrs. Bennet's lack of propriety as well. Although, if I had known that her mother was going to be quite so dreadful, I should have contrived to stop with some of my friends in town during her visit.

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During the above speech ELIZABETH has crept back in for her gloves. She listens to MISS BINGLEY's response unconcernedly, expecting little else from her, but freezes in horror when MISS DARCY begins to speak again.

MISS BINGLEY [*even more sarcastically*]: What? And desert your dearest sister-in-law in her time of trial?

MISS DARCY: I am sometimes tempted to leave, but the thought of what my brother suffers as well has kept me at home. Oh, Caroline, I must tell you that these past weeks have been such a trial. Elizabeth has borne them well, but she cannot feel the embarrassment that I have when my neighbors and acquaintances have come to call. Sometimes I wonder how my brother can stand the exposure her impropriety has cast upon us all.

MISS BINGLEY: Are you certain, Georgiana, that he will stand it? How can you be sure that even now he is not regretting his foolish marriage? Can you?

MISS DARCY says nothing but looks at the floor. This is answer enough for MISS BINGLEY, whose smile is reminiscent of a cat that has eaten a canary. The shocked ELIZABETH turns to leave but knocks a book off the table. Startled, the other ladies turn to her, but she runs out of the room in confusion.

Set returns to normal, and lights come up on the ladies exactly as they were before the sequence began.

ELIZABETH [*dazed*]: Can it be worth it? Is it? [*determinedly*] How can I even be considering such a thing? This is foolish! I love Darcy, and he loves me! Of that I am sure. And yet, to become the object of such censure. Perhaps he will change his regard for me, based on my family. The thought is too horrible to entertain, and yet I must entertain it.

MARIANNE: You understand, now, Miss Bennet, the nature of my fear, do you not?

ELIZABETH: Yes, I understand it only too well. I cannot believe that I have succumbed to such irrational thoughts. It is utterly ridiculous. [*Tries to laugh, and begins to cry softly*]. But if it should come true! It might, perhaps.

EMMA: Miss Bennet, do sit down. [*Leads her to a chair and hovers over her*]. You have already exhibited such a strength of character and of love! How can you be so suddenly disconsolate? It makes me feel uneasy myself.

CATHERINE: Why should you be uneasy, Miss Woodhouse? Forgive my familiarity, but you seem to be inordinately certain of your own mind.

EMMA [*chuckles*]: Ah, yes, Miss Morland. You do not offend me with your candid assessment of my character. For you are only too correct. Well do I know my own independence, and I am quite familiar with the consequences of believing myself to know what is best for everybody.

CATHERINE: Whatever can you mean?

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EMMA: There was a time in the not-too-distant past, my dear ladies, when I considered myself an incurable matchmaker. I took pride in my own wit and constantly amused myself by trying to match up the couples I thought most deserving of each other. I also valued my own independence to such an extent that I was unwilling to take advice where it was most needed.

CATHERINE: Why were you so convinced of your own merit?

EMMA: That is not a very complimentary question, but once again you have succeeded in being most insightful, Miss Morland. Unlike Miss Bennet, I was not blessed with four sisters or with the presence of a mother, distressing though she might sometimes be. I, instead, became the mistress of our estate while just entering young ladyhood, on account of the marriage of my only sister. My mother having died many years before, I was also solely responsible for my invalid father, who has long depended on me for everything.

ANNE: That is quite a compliment to your character, Miss Woodhouse. It cannot be as black as you paint it for us.

EMMA: Thank you, Miss Elliot, but you have just excused me again, which is something that everybody I knew was guilty of, even Mrs. Weston, who is my dearest friend as well as my old governess. There was only one person who did not scruple to scold me when I deserved it, the brother of my sister's husband, and also our nearest neighbor, a Mr. Knightley.

CATHERINE: Is this Mr. Knightley well-regarded by your father, also?

EMMA: Yes, in fact. As my sister's brother-in-law, Mr. Knightley has always been most welcome at Hartfield. So much so that he always acted as elder brother role in affairs that concerned myself.

CATHERINE: Dear me! Is he much older than you?

EMMA: Quite. He is sixteen years older than I. Yet when I was 21 and he was 37, we were such good companions that he seemed scarcely 30, despite his frequent admonitions. I did not know how much I depended on his company until after an eventful year in which I nearly ruined the prospect of one happy marriage by attempting to bring about what would have been a disastrous one. He scolded me roundly, especially after I hurt the feelings of an old friend with what I thought was my wit, and it was then that I realized that I could not do without Mr. Knightley.

MARIANNE: You did say that you, also, were on the point of marriage, Miss Woodhouse. Can it be that this Mr. Knightley is the man to whom you are engaged to?

EMMA [*smiling*]: I can now say with certainty that I no longer regard him as an elder brother, but as my Mr. Knightley, whom I shall marry shortly.

CATHERINE: But you said that he was sixteen years older than you! How can you marry such an old man?

ANNE: Miss Morland, consider the company you are speaking in! I myself am nearly thirty, and I do not consider thirty-seven so very old.

EMMA: And neither would you, Miss Morland, if you could see Mr. Knightly. He is but in the prime of life, and he is as fine a specimen as a gentleman, husband and landlord as you will find anywhere.

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MARIANNE: Then what can be troubling you?

EMMA: There is only one thing that endangers our future happiness.

MARIANNE: What can it be? You seem both of you to have everything?

EMMA: Yes, including my headstrong nature. I mentioned before that I was an incurable matchmaker. It was a source of great contention between Mr. Knightley and me.

ELIZABETH: But it has been resolved, has it not?

EMMA: I only wish. Sometimes I think that I am cured of meddling in other people's affairs, but then I get such an urge to help nature along. My fear is that it might crop up anywhere, at anytime, and might someday pose a threat to the regard Mr. Knightley has for me.

Light change, set rearranged for third dream sequence.

Lights up on Donwell Abbey five years hence. MRS. EMMA KNIGHTLEY is standing over a beautifully decorated dinner table. MRS. WESTON has just entered, and is still wearing her cloak.

MRS. WESTON: I just stopped in for a moment, Emma. I am on my way to visit Miss Bates in the village, and I thought you might wish to send her a message.

EMMA: Thank you, Mrs. Weston. You may tell Miss Bates that Mr. Knightley and I will be pleased to send a carriage to convey her to Mrs. Cole's party tomorrow night.

MRS. WESTON: Such kindness, Emma! You are always so eager to give another pleasure. But what can you do be doing now? Why are you arranging the table? What has become of the housekeeper?

EMMA: Shhh! I sent Blake to the village for an errand, but she might return at any moment. The truth is, I was most ready to have her out of the house this afternoon.

MRS. WESTON [*bewildered*]: But why?

EMMA: My dear Mrs. Weston, you say that I love to give pleasure to others. That is true. And there has always been a person in this household for whom I have longed to do something. Our housekeeper, Blake, has always been so unpleasant.

MRS. WESTON [*suspiciously*]: Emma, what are you talking about?

EMMA: Haven't you guessed? Well then, what is the surest way to bring happiness to an old widow? Why, by arranging a marriage so that she will no longer be an old widow, of course! What other event could secure her happiness so thoroughly, and bring a smile to that careworn and, I might add, shrewish face?

MRS. WESTON [*shocked*]: Emma! I thought you cured yourself of this matchmaking nonsense long ago after the dismal affair of Harriet Smith and Mr. Elton! Remember how that turned out! I might also point out that a second marriage would not make her any less of a widow.

EMMA: You understand my point, at least. Now, don't try to dissuade me, Mrs. Weston. I know that there were some inherent problems in that first match—

MRS. WESTON [*interrupting*]: Such as the utter cold-heartedness of Mr. Elton and

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the blind obedience Harriet gave you.

EMMA [*speaking over her friend*]: but I am sure that luck will be with us this time.

You must admit the affair turned out well. Harriet and her Mr. Martin are perfectly happy, and Mr. Elton got a wife no better than he deserved.

MRS. WESTON [*sarcastically*]: Yes, Mrs. Elton certainly is an addition to the neighborhood social stature. [*conceding, as she inevitably does with Emma*] But, you are right about Harriet and Mr. Martin. Perhaps the affair will turn out right somehow. Who is the unfortunate man to whom you are matchmaking Blake?

EMMA: I knew that you would understand how perfect it all is! I have invited Williams, the butler at the Cole's estate, to tea this afternoon. He is so grim and funereal that I am sure he is secretly longing to be married!

MRS. WESTON: I must admit that I cannot follow your reasoning at all! But I know better than to trifle with your well laid plans, Emma. However, I cannot help feeling that there is something intrinsically wrong with your scheme, other than its utter impropriety. Are you so certain that Blake wishes to find another husband?

EMMA [*happily*]: Perfectly certain, Mrs. Weston. Why do you ask?

MRS. WESTON [*slowly*]: I seem to remember something about her ... something about her husband ...

EMMA: Whatever it was, he's been dead so long I never saw them together, and her son over at the stables is becoming middle aged himself, so I'm sure she won't object to the idea of a new husband.

MRS. WESTON: She has a grown son? Emma, I declare, you know the affairs of your housekeeper better than any woman I ever met! Did you consult him about your scheme?

EMMA: Of course not! I don't want any interference. If there's one thing I cannot abide, it is interference. Now no more scolding. I don't want Mr. Knightley to know what I am planning. He is bound to scold me even worse than you are doing, and so I intend for the match to be a complete surprise to him. He'll be grateful to be greeted by a smiling housekeeper, at any rate.

MRS. WESTON: I do not approve, Emma, but I know that I cannot dissuade you. I wish you the best of all possible luck, and I will carry your kind message about the carriage to Miss Bates.

MRS. WESTON exits. EMMA is struck by an idea, and after carefully looking both ways, pulls the two chairs closer together. She judges the distance between them and frowns. It is still too far. She pulls them so close that they are touching, and smiles conspiratorially, but quickly pushes them apart and looks up with a guilty expression as BLAKE enters. BLAKE is sour-faced and grumpy, but treats her employer with the proper respect.

BLAKE: Good afternoon, mum. The dressmaker was not at home, and so I could not ask her about the bonnet.

EMMA: Ah, good afternoon, Blake! It is no bother about the bonnet. I'll see her myself tomorrow. And how are you after your long walk? Are you feeling hungry?

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- BLAKE [*surprised*]: Why yes, I confess I am, but my tea can wait until after you and Mr. Knightley have supped. I see that Matilda has arranged the table. Let me see if Cook is ready to serve the meal.
- EMMA: No, no, Blake. I insist you sit down here at once [*indicating a chair*]. I'll speak to Cook myself.
- BLAKE [*now thoroughly astonished*]: Sit down? What can you be thinking of, Mrs. Knightley? Are you feeling well?
- EMMA [*chuckling*]: I am perfectly fine, dear Blake. Please, do sit down while you await your guest. [*pushes her into the chair*] Tonight we shall switch roles. You shall eat and I shall serve. What do you think of that plan?
- BLAKE [*rising*]: Mum, have you lost your senses? What do you mean, "my guest?" Who should be visiting me?
- EMMA [*pushing her back into the chair*]: Blake, *do* sit down. You will be ever so grateful once you understand fully. The truth is, I have invited Williams, the butler from Mrs. Cole's estate, to tea with you.
- BLAKE [*stops struggling and falls limply into the chair in shock*]: Williams? That sour old man? To tea with me? Why?
- EMMA [*smiling*]: Now, now, this may come as a surprise to you, but I do not think that Williams is simply a sour old man. In fact, I have good reason to believe that he considers you as more than a shrewish old woman, as well. Consider Mr. Knightley and myself. We are both so felicitous in our happy state of marriage. Cannot marriage do the same for the both of you?
- BLAKE [*so astonished she does not even comprehend EMMA's veiled insult*]: Marriage? Me and Williams?
- EMMA [*happily*]: You understand at last! No, no, don't attempt to thank me. Your future happiness is all the thanks required. Do I hear a knock on the door?
- BLAKE [*forcefully*]: Mrs. Knightley! What can you be thinking? Have you not met Mr. Blake, the groom at the stables?
- EMMA: Of course I have, my dear, and I do not think you should suffer any qualms on his part. Any son would be quite happy to see his ailing mother married again.
- BLAKE: My son? Mr. Blake is not my son!
- EMMA: Well, then, who is he? Your nephew? It does not signify, anyway. He will have only a periphery interest in the matter since—
- BLAKE [*distinctly speaking over EMMA*]: Mrs. Knightley, Mr. Blake is not my son. He is my husband.
- EMMA [*for once shocked out of her composure*]: Your h-husband? But how is that possible? He is so young, and you are ... you are—
- BLAKE [*stoutly, and circling the confused EMMA*]: I am only 41 years old, and quite as hale and hearty as my 40-year-old husband. Mrs. Knightley, I had heard about your tendency towards thoughtlessness and interference before, of course, but this is beyond anything I could ever have imagined. My husband and I shall take this matter to Mr. Knightley, you can be sure. I would be very surprised if we were both still in your employ tomorrow morning. Good evening, madam.

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BLAKE stalks out in controlled rage. EMMA stands rooted to the ground, shocked and muttering to herself. At first she is too surprised to understand fully what has happened, but she grows louder and more distinct as she begins to realize what she has done.

EMMA: Her husband? Her *husband*? How can it be? Her husband? Oh, what a dreadful mistake ... I must rectify it before Mr. Knightley discovers it. He shall be so ashamed of me, and he will laugh at me, which may be worse. Her husband? I would never have dreamed it possible. But if Mr. Knightley finds out what I have done ... Mrs. Blake! Do come back and be reasonable! Please, I was only trying to help you. Please don't speak to Mr. Knightley. Mrs. Blake! Blake!

EMMA runs horrified out of the room.

Set returns to normal. Lights up on ladies as they were before sequence.

ELIZABETH, CATHERINE, MARIANNE and ANNE are all laughing while EMMA sits in silence. The other four continue to laugh until they are worn out and only chuckling. EMMA can stand it no longer.

EMMA: I do not understand what is *quite* so funny about the matter. It was an honest mistake, and I did have good intentions.

ANNE: Now, Miss Woodhouse, do not become defensive. We are not laughing at you. We are merely chuckling at the situation. It is so absurd.

ELIZABETH: Could you ever do anything so silly, Miss Woodhouse? I cannot believe it?

EMMA: Unfortunately, Miss Bennet, I have done worse. The consequences of my first dismal attempt at matchmaking would have been disastrous indeed had affairs gone according to my original intention. It is a wonder that Mr. Knightley still loves me after all of the ridiculous mistakes that I have made. Perhaps he does not, after all. Perhaps he is merely on a crusade to put me where I cannot harm any more innocent people. He may feel it is his duty to marry me. He has become so accustomed to looking after me.

CATHERINE: Oh, Miss Woodhouse, do not speak so! I am quite convinced in the strength of your attachment.

EMMA: Thank you for the kind words, Miss Morland, but they do me no good. The trouble is I do not believe just now that he truly loves me, and nobody will be able to persuade me otherwise. No, I cannot see myself residing happily at the Abbey as long as I carry this dreadful tendency to arrange other people's lives.

CATHERINE: Do stop speaking of an Abbey, Miss Woodhouse! You do not know what associations that word carries for me. In the midst of such gloominess, I begin to doubt my own prospects of happiness at my Abbey.

ELIZABETH: *Your* Abbey? Do you tell us that you, too, are on the point of marriage?

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CATHERINE [*returning to the center of the room and preparing to make a clean breast of it*]: Oh, but indeed I am! Incredible as it seems, I, too, am in love and have received the love of a most worthy man, my dear Henry Tilney, the future owner of Northanger Abbey. I was in Bath this fortnight visiting his sister, who was recently married to Lord Stavely.

EMMA: And no doubt you also spent a little time with the gentleman himself?

CATHERINE [*blushing*]: Of course. How could I travel so far and not see the man whom I am pledged to marry?

ANNE: And how was your visit?

CATHERINE: It was quite marvelous, until the concert. And even afterward, I managed to forget how uncomfortable I had been and spent the rest of the journey in tolerable, even joyous, spirits.

MARIANNE: What concert do you speak of? I adore music! Why, pray tell, should a concert make you uncomfortable?

CATHERINE: Oh, do not misunderstand my love of music. I do love to listen, though I know little about it. That is the trouble, you see. I do know so little about music, and drawing, and the things most accomplished young ladies learn from their governesses, and Miss Harris is no doubt an expert in them all!

ELIZABETH: Miss Harris? Who is she, and what has she to do with your future happiness? And how is a concert important? Miss Morland, we are all thoroughly confused. If you please, begin your tale again and do not forget that we are unacquainted with any of its particulars.

CATHERINE [*apologetically*]: Of course. Forgive me, ladies. While in Bath last year I became acquainted with a young man at the assembly rooms, whose name was Henry Tilney. He introduced me to his sister, for whom I had an instant sympathy. All proceeded so well in our friendship that when it came time for the two of them to leave Bath for Northanger Abbey with their father, I was invited to be the companion of Miss Eleanor Tilney.

EMMA: This is a most convenient arrangement for romance. I dare say you and Mr. Tilney did not find it difficult to move from a mutual love of the sister to a love of each other.

CATHERINE [*blushing*]: Indeed, Miss Woodhouse, I admit it was something like that. But we were not without our own difficulties in forming an attachment. At first I felt dreadfully ignorant among Henry and Eleanor, but they put me at ease so tactfully and thoughtfully, and Henry so carefully instructed me in the finer points of drawing and general taste that I did not feel so inferior as I had in the beginning. I had no qualms after everything was finally settled between Henry and me, which occurred soon after Eleanor married Lord Stavely.

ANNE: Then why are you fearful now, dear Catherine?

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CATHERINE: It was while I was attending a concert in Bath with Eleanor that I first began to meet the young ladies with whom Henry had long been intimate. I was introduced to a Mrs. Spencer, a most intimidating woman, and her niece, Miss Harris. It was while Eleanor was attending to other friends that I exchanged a few words alone with Mrs. Spencer, and I was soon made to understand that Miss Harris and Henry had once been intimate friends, and that their engagement had been on the point of being settled when he met me.

MARIANNE: I do not see why such knowledge pains you, Miss Morland. I would think that such a communication would only prove how much Mr. Tilney preferred you to her.

CATHERINE [*expressively*]: You have not glimpsed this Miss Harris! She is quite accomplished, in every particular, as well as being perfectly lovely. I am the fourth of ten children, and while my family is neither poor nor neglected, my mother did not have time to instruct me in the finer points of taste, and I had no great liking for drawing or music as a girl. My mother never engaged a governess, and I know that I am not beautiful.

ANNE: But you, Catherine, are Henry's choice of a wife, not Miss Harris.

CATHERINE: Yes, and I cannot understand why! What if Henry begins to regret his choice?

Lights and set change for final dream sequence.

MRS. CATHERINE TILNEY is entertaining guests at Henry's Woodston parsonage shortly after her marriage. MRS. SPENCER and MISS HARRIS are in attendance, as are LADY ELEANOR STAVELY and MRS. ALLEN. MRS. SPENCER and MISS HARRIS have just sat down. Each holds a teacup and saucer.

CATHERINE: Welcome to my new home, Mrs. Spencer and Miss Harris. It is very kind of you to oblige me with a visit.

MRS. SPENCER: Good afternoon, Mrs. Tilney, Lady Eleanor. I do not believe I have met your friend.

CATHERINE: Allow me to introduce, Mrs. Allen, one of my dearest friends from home. It was she who first brought me to Bath.

MRS. ALLEN: Yes, Bath is such a diversion for seeing the new fashions. Although I did get a big rent in my best Mechlin gown while we were there, but I found a lovely dressmaker shop that mended it so well you can hardly tell now where it was.

MRS. SPENCER: How do you do?

MRS. ALLEN: Good afternoon, Mrs. Spencer, Miss Harris.

MISS HARRIS nods in acknowledgment, while Mrs. Spencer takes a haughty sip of tea.

LADY ELEANOR [*warmly*]: And it was such a fortunate occurrence [that she did bring you to Bath, was it not, dear Catherine? Imagine if we had never met?

CATHERINE: I do not like to even imagine such a frightening idea, my dear Eleanor. Although our first days were not so pleasant, were they Mrs. Allen?

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MRS. ALLEN: Indeed no, Catherine dear. I shall never forget how melancholy it was without my usual friends there. That, of course, was before you first danced with Mr. Tilney at the Assembly Rooms. Such an agreeable young man he was. I recall that evening very well. It was the first time I wore my new silk gloves.

LADY ELEANOR: He still is quite agreeable, is he not, Catherine?

CATHERINE [*laughing*]: I daresay he is the most agreeable husband I have ever had, ladies.

MRS. SPENCER [*frostily*]: We have known Henry since he was a child of four years, and I am sure my niece Susan best knows the evenness of his temperament, do you not?

MISS HARRIS: Oh, I have no claim to Henry other than that of an old friend, Aunt Spencer. Though I often have felt myself quite as much his sister as Eleanor.

LADY ELEANOR: We did have gay times as children, did we not, Susan? Do you recall that French master that Henry could imitate so well?

MISS HARRIS: There is no chance of my forgetting it. How much I have always loved French! I suppose that comes of having had such an excellent tutor as a girl. How did you find your tutor, Mrs. Tilney?

CATHERINE [*confused*]: I did not have a tutor, I fear. My mother taught me French, and I must confess to being an indifferent student.

MISS HARRIS: Indeed. I have never understood people who were not immensely fond of French, but perhaps that is because I have always had such a liking for French art. I am excessively fond of the Rococo artists. Tell me, do you prefer Fragonard or Watteau?

CATHERINE, having never heard of either artist, is flabbergasted. She is rescued by LADY ELEANOR, though not before MRS. ALLEN seizes the opportunity to return to her favorite subject.

MRS. ALLEN: For my part, I have always been excessively fond of the French fashion.

Awkward pause before LADY ELEANOR steps in.

LADY ELEANOR: Catherine was always much too interested in the doings of her older brothers to leave time for the intricacies of art history, were you not, dear? She is such a loving sister.

MRS. SPENCER: But surely she devoted time to drawing. I always say that it is a mark of distinction when a young lady can draw well. If she were not so modest, I fear that Susan would be always besieged with requests for portraits. She holds a brush so well.

MISS HARRIS: Well, I will confess that there is a certain talent to capturing the very personality of a friend in paint, Aunt Spencer. But perhaps Mrs. Tilney has other subjects of interest. We cannot all be portraitists, you know. [*Miss Harris and Mrs. Spencer dissolve into affected giggles, after which there is an slight silence.*]

STEPHANIE RENEE FOSNIGHT

CATHERINE [*attempting to rise to the occasion*]: I am very much afraid that my favorite subjects were always barnyard animals about my village, and I have not attempted to capture the likeness of our cook's chickens in over ten years [*gives a stilted laugh, which ends most unfortunately in a snort*]

MISS HARRIS [*persistent*]: Well, surely you must be inclined to music, then. I often fear that I will not be able to quit the pianoforte once I sit down at it, especially if I am practicing a concerto.

MRS. SPENCER: My dear Susan, you are not being fair to yourself. You know that you will willingly trade the pianoforte for your harp at any time. Did you ever have opportunity to learn the harp, Mrs. Tilney?

CATHERINE [*weakly*]: Unfortunately, we did not possess such an instrument.

MISS HARRIS: But the piano? How did you enjoy your lessons?

CATHERINE: Not at all, I am afraid. I recall with shame my joy the day that the music master was dismissed.

MRS. SPENCER and MISS HARRIS purse their lips in disbelief and take significant sips of tea while MRS. ALLEN remains serenely unconcerned with the relevant conversation.

MRS. ALLEN [*after a pause*]: Yes, I have been so pleased with the new empire waist. It shows one's figure to such advantage.

No one is quite sure what to make of this remark, and there is another pause before LADY ELEANOR comes to the rescue once again.

LADY ELEANOR: Catherine, I do not believe that our guests have seen your charming new pleasure grounds yet. Why do I not show them about the garden while you wait for Henry? You know he would be quite disappointed if you were not here to greet him when he arrives home.

CATHERINE [*faintly*]: Yes, thank you, Eleanor dear. I shall wait here and ... and think.

LADY ELEANOR leads the other ladies out to the garden. MRS. SPENCER and MISS HARRIS exit with a nod to CATHERINE, while MRS. ALLEN follows.

MRS. ALLEN [*anxiously, as she exits*]: I am not entirely certain that this damp weather is at all good for my lace. It is Valenciennes, you know, and I had my dressmaker send to France for it.

Silence. CATHERINE rises from her chair in dismay, crosses to the settee, and sits. She rises again. She picks up a book of French verse from the table and reads a bit haltingly aloud before throwing it down in frustration. She begins to hum a bit of a song, but cannot find the tune and gives that up in despair. She crosses to a painting hanging on the wall and speaks to the departed MISS HARRIS.

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CATHERINE [*conversationally*]: Why, yes, Miss Harris, I am quite fond of a Rococo painting myself, though I do feel that the rendering of light is much more masterful in the Italian style, the ... the ... The style which that great artist used to such advantage, Mr. Bot-bot-istroni? No, that's not right at all. [*desperately*] Oh, *why* didn't I study these things more? I'm completely unfit to be Henry's wife. [*resorts to tears*] I don't see why he ever married me in the first place. It is apparent that Susan Harris would have made him a much better wife in all particulars. [*tears begin to crescendo*] No doubt she is congratulating herself on having made me miserable, but it does not signify. Nothing matters now. I am sure that once Henry sees her he will be reminded of the inferiority of his choice, especially when she begins to talk beside me. I can imagine him now. He will think to himself "I must never go to Bath again. There must have been some trick of the light which endeared Catherine to me. To think I actually considered her more charming than Susan." Yes, those will be his very thoughts. For how can he truly prefer me? I am her inferior in birth, in beauty and in education. [*now openly sobbing*] Mrs. Spencer and Miss Harris have done their work well. I am abjectly miserable indeed. How can I face Henry now? The thought is impossible. [*pauses and then begins to move about the room purposefully*] Stay! I can leave here. We have been married only a few weeks. I am sure that Henry can obtain an annulment, once he realizes the disparity of the match. [*returns to tears*] I shall be miserable, but that signifies nothing. I will live out my days as a comfort to my mother. She does not mind my ignorance. Yes, I must leave immediately. But Henry! How can I live without him? [*collapses in tears*]

Set returns to normal. Characters as before.

CATHERINE, EMMA, MARIANNE and ELIZABETH are all wailing. ANNE rises and comes to stand in the center of the room. Her gaze travels over each woman in disbelief. CATHERINE is standing up right, her shoulders heaving. ELIZABETH and MARIANNE have their arms about each other as they sit on the settee sobbing. EMMA is sitting on a chair busily blowing her nose and wiping her eyes with her handkerchief. After a few noisy moments, ANNE takes charge.

ANNE [*most severely*]: I am scandalized! Each of you stop crying this very instant. I mean it! Now! Look at me!

In shock each lady looks up. ELIZABETH and MARIANNE draw apart while CATHERINE draws herself up to her full height. EMMA finishes blowing her nose noisily in the silence, and then turns attentively to ANNE.

ANNE [*severely, to Catherine*]: Miss Morland, sit over there, next to Misses Bennet and Dashwood. Miss Woodhouse, draw your chair over near the settee. I want to be able to address all four of you at once, for you are all most sorely in need of what I have to say. I expect each of you to be closely attentive.

The women comply, still too astonished to do anything else.

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ANNE: Now that you are listening, heed my words well. By some strange twist of chance, the five of us have been brought together in this very room of this very inn at this very crossroads. Each of us is on the point of marriage. [*The other four start in surprise at hearing this.*] Yes, I, too, the spinster Miss Elliot, am about to be married. However, unlike you young ladies, this is not the first time I have been on the point of marriage. When I was but nineteen years old I fell violently in love with a young captain named Wentworth. [*Slide of two Regency lovers courting appears on wall above ANNE's head*] It may come as a surprise to you to learn that I am the daughter of Sir Walter Elliot of Kellynch Hall. However, it was this very nobility of my birth which first prevented my happiness. My mother having died when I was a girl, I relied very heavily upon the advice of a Lady Russell, who had become both mother and father to me, owing to the indifference my father has always shown me. When I informed Lady Russell of the engagement between Captain Wentworth and myself, she was troubled. [*slide change to that of older woman counseling younger tearful woman, while a man watches in dismay*] You may not think it now, but I was considered very pretty at the age of nineteen, and I was also the daughter of a baronet. Captain Wentworth was poor, and had nothing to tempt me but his love. That would have been enough for me, but Lady Russell was convinced that I would be heaping shame upon my father and herself, as well as throwing myself away by marrying a penniless captain. I would not have listened to her at all if I had not, as I said, always considered her my second mother. It was with many tears that I made the decision to refuse Captain Wentworth and please Lady Russell. She succeeded in convincing me that it would be quite the best for Captain Wentworth, as well, if I would give him up. And so I did. I persuaded him that I did not love him, which he did not at first believe, and that I could not marry him, which he understood at length. He left the country in well-deserved anger. I did not see him for seven years.

ANNE pauses to catch her breath. The other four ladies are still staring at her in astonishment, and hanging on her every word. Slide changes to show a woman waiting by a window.

ANNE [*continuing*]: One day last year, through a strange set of circumstances, Captain Wentworth returned to my quiet life. He had contrived to make both a name for bravery and a fortune for himself, but I did not consider that when I saw him again for the first time. I had the realization that I still loved him, and that my love was even more intense than when I was a girl. As for Captain Wentworth, though, time seemed to have healed his wounds, and he spent many weeks in the company of my sister's family and me, all the while treating me as the most inconsequential of acquaintances. No one ever knew what had passed between us seven years earlier, and no one ever knew what pain his return caused me. [*pause, while slide changes to show a courting couple walking on a road, while a single woman follows behind*] It soon became clear that Captain Wentworth was paying considerable attention to a girl named Louisa Musgrove, who is connected to me by my sister's marriage, and Louisa delighted in the

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Captain's affections. They seemed to be on the point of an engagement when she suffered a grievous accident and, as a consequence, fell in love with another man. Captain Wentworth was now free once more, and we came into contact with each other even more frequently than before. [*slide change to show young woman reading a letter while a young man looks over her shoulder*] Finally, after I had been pursued by another man, Captain Wentworth told me that he loved me still, and that even when he had been fascinated with Louisa he had been unconsciously comparing her with me. I straightaway revealed the knowledge of my unwavering love to him, and we were reconciled.

CATHERINE [*rapturously charmed by the tale, and clapping her hands together*]: Oh, I am so glad, Miss Elliot!

MARIANNE: [*likewise delighted*]: As am I! How romantic, that you have been reconciled after eight years, and that your love has only grown stronger!

EMMA: [*more cautiously, suspecting a moral*]: I must say that it is a riveting tale, and a proof of the power of affection.

ELIZABETH [*thoughtfully*]: I would rather call it a lucky coincidence, that you were reunited through circumstances and then discovered that you still loved one another.

ANNE [*gently*]: Would you, Miss Bennet? Coincidence or not, I know that I have been given a chance to correct my earlier folly.

During the following speech, ANNE addresses each lady in turn.

ANNE: I have sat here and listened as each of you has related fears about your upcoming marriages. Those fears are natural, of course, and you do well to recognize and consider them. But consider also the consequences of your fears run amok.

Takes CATHERINE's hand and helps her up. Brings her to the center of the room and turns to face her.

ANNE: You, Miss Catherine Morland, are afraid that your husband will cease to love you when he discovers what you call ignorance. From my experience with you today, I see no fault of ignorance about you, but merely an openness and charming affection for your friends that makes it easy to understand why Mr. Tilney loves you. Your humility is no doubt also an asset to him, especially if he has been used to the company of such people as the insufferably proud Miss Harris.

ANNE [*now turns to EMMA*]: You, Miss Woodhouse, are afraid to marry Mr. Knightley for fear of offending him with your creative schemes. But it is clear to me that your matchmaking impulses are the result of a generous and happy nature which wants to secure happiness for all those around you. No doubt Mr. Knightley sees this and values it in you, and he probably also appreciates the ridiculousness of some of your schemes. Let me only say that life is hard sometimes, and that we all need a little laughter to carry us through it gracefully. I would wager that Mr. Knightley enjoys the entertainment value of your matchmaking schemes. The deeper fear that you contend with, I think, is the fact

you are not perfect. You are marrying a man who demands much, and you have always demanded much of yourself. This might be a dangerous combination, except you have been given the gift of laughter. Use it, and learn to laugh at yourself. In time you will begin to discern what is helpful and what is harmful to others. Meanwhile, I see no reason here for preventing a marriage of true love and affection.

ANNE [*to ELIZABETH*]: As for you, Miss Elizabeth Bennet, I well understand how it is to have relatives that embarrass one. The only difference between you and me is that my father and sisters are titled and so make only greater fools of themselves when they display their utter want of propriety and decency. I first rejected my love to save myself embarrassment and censure and nearly ruined the future happiness of both myself and Captain Wentworth. If you break your engagement with Mr. Darcy because you are afraid of damaging his reputation, you will, in the end, do an even greater damage to his heart and your own. It is quite clear to me that you love each other exceedingly, and be assured that as long as you retain your excellent ability to laugh, all of your fears will be reconciled.

ANNE [*sitting beside MARIANNE*]: And finally I come to you, Miss Marianne Dashwood. You are the one that began us all on this journey of self-reflection and self-deprecation. I am sorry that you have so distressed yourself as to run away, leaving in your trail sadness and worry for your friends, but let me just say this: Anyone who is so frightened by a dream as to desert everything that she holds dear is in no danger of ever becoming overly sensible. You were unfortunate in your first choice of a husband, but if you truly love Colonel Brandon as much as you say you do, then your passionate temperament will not suffer in combination with his more practical nature. I would expect, rather, that you would find in your marriage a perfect blend of sense and sensibility that would serve only to enrich the partnership and endear you both to each other. [*ANNE stands and addresses all of the ladies*]: And let all of you remember this. When it came time for me to marry all those years ago, I not only entertained these fears but I acted upon them. I refused to marry the man that I loved and I have been miserable for it ever since. You do not know how many times during the colorless seven years that followed I wished that I had had more strength of character to overcome my fears. God heard me in my misery, and granted me another chance at happiness. Be assured that I am now reaching for it wholeheartedly, and I encourage each of you to do the same. I do not often open my heart to even my closest friends, and I hope that my complete frankness before you all is proof of the good will I wish to extend to each of you.

ANNE crosses to a chair and falls into it, exhausted. The others look at each other. EMMA crosses to ANNE and shakes her hand.

EMMA: Thank you, Miss Elliot, for having the courage to share your wisdom with me. I see now the unfoundedness of my fears, and I am ready to return to Hartfield and also to Mr. Knightley. I hope one day to invite you to visit us, and you can meet the sour-faced Blake yourself. She does exist, you know, and if she is already married it has not done much for her disposition. But at least my husband and I shall be more than happy to receive you. Or any of you ladies.

ELIZABETH: And I hope to extend the same invitation to Pemberley. It really is the most beautiful estate in Derbyshire. I am certain Mr. Darcy should be particularly gracious in gaining your acquaintanceship, Miss Elliot, especially when I tell him how much of our happiness we owe to you. [*crosses to ANNE and cordially shakes her hand*] And now I am sure that my aunt and uncle are ready to continue on our journey. I must wish you ladies adieu. [*exits*]

EMMA: I, too, am sure that my horses are refreshed and it is time for me to return home. I have spent a most informative afternoon with you, Miss Elliot, Miss Morland, and Miss Dashwood. May we meet again. [*collects packages and exits*]

CATHERINE: My dear Miss Elliot! [*embracing her*] To think that we have traveled all the way from Bath together as strangers while having so much in common. I think the coach is ready to depart, but we shall not travel as strangers now, shall we?

ANNE [*returning her embrace*]: Indeed not, my dear Catherine. And you must be sure to come visit the Captain and me when we are settled. And perhaps I may someday get a glimpse of this famous Abbey, shall I not?

CATHERINE: Indeed you shall! Henry and I would not let you and Captain Wentworth refuse the invitation. I shall save you a place near me on the seat. [*exits*]

ANNE [*laying a hand on MARIANNE's shoulder*]: Miss Dashwood, how do you fare?

MARIANNE [*taking ANNE's other hand*]: Only very ashamed, Miss Elliot, though quite relieved in spirit. I see now how unfounded my fears were. To think I carried them to such an extent! Do not concern yourself about me. I know very well the stage to take home, and I believe I shall reach there before dark.

ANNE: Do not be too ashamed, dear Marianne. Remember that you are not the only one who has acted foolishly. Yet are you sure that you love this Colonel enough to marry him? It is not such a bad thing to live unmarried, though society may look down on us for it. The evil only comes when we sacrifice love for the sake of our pride.

MARIANNE [*blushing*]: I am so sure of my love for Colonel Brandon, my friend, that I have been composing my apology these past ten minutes, ever since you first began to speak. Though to be sure, the romance of our estrangement will add considerable passion to the relationship, do not you think?

ANNE [*laughing*]: I do not presume to be an expert in matters of romance, but I can see that you are. Follow your heart, dear Marianne, but temper your passion with wisdom. I must go. [*exits*]

NOTES

MARIANNE picks up her bonnet and prepares to leave. Suddenly, she stops and returns to the sofa on which she fainted. She drops limply into it in memory, then stands abruptly and giggles to herself.

MARIANNE: I did do it admirably well, did I not? Sometimes I amaze myself. Wait until I tell Elinor about this adventure. She shall be sure to censure me roundly, but I do not care. To think that my running away resulted in the preservation of four marriages! Someone ought to write a romance about that! [*exits*]

THE END

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