

SÉANCE AND SENSIBILITY

by Christina Hamlett and Jamie Dare

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ISBN: 978-1-64479-020-5

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SÉANCE AND SENSIBILITY

A Full Length Comedy

by **Christina Hamlett and Jamie Dare**

SYNOPSIS: Is there anything worse than being impoverished in 1810 England and sent to live with relatives who think you're plain, tedious and unmarried? While the prospects for happiness seem dim for the Dashwood girls, Marianne convinces older sister Elinor that learning how to conduct profitable séances at home could yield the necessary dowry for them to attract handsome husbands. Romantic complications ensue with meddling matrons, conniving social climbers, broken promises, shy suitors and a trio of ghosts from the afterlife who wonder why their eternal sleep keeps getting interrupted by a ditzzy girl with a crystal ball.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(11-12 females, 5 males; doubling possible)

ELINOR DASHWOOD (f).....	A sensible young woman. <i>(108 lines)</i>
MARIANNE DASHWOOD (f).....	Elinor's younger sister. <i>(118 lines)</i>
MRS. DASHWOOD (f).....	Elinor and Marianne's mum. <i>(33 lines)</i>
MRS. JENNINGS (f).....	A kindly widow and aspiring matchmaker. <i>(53 lines)</i>
JOHN WILLOUGHBY (m).....	A handsome and rakish suitor. <i>(37 lines)</i>
EDWARD FERRARS (m).....	A handsome suitor. <i>(91 lines)</i>
ROBERT FERRARS (m).....	Edward's younger brother. <i>(16 lines)</i>
MRS. FERRARS (f).....	Edward and Robert's control-freak mother. <i>(20 lines)</i>
FANNY FERRARS DASHWOOD (f).....	Edward and Robert's gossipy sister. Married to the son of Elinor and Marianne's late father's first wife. <i>(10 lines)</i>

- COLONEL BRANDON (m)..... An older, steadfast bachelor.
(39 lines)
- ANNE STEELE (f)..... A cousin of Mrs. Jennings.
(124 lines)
- LUCY STEELE (f)..... Anne's younger social climbing
sister. (44 lines)
- DAISY (f)..... A dutiful maid. (9 lines)
- HENRY DASHWOOD (m)..... A pompous ghost. Elinor and
Marianne's father. (13 lines)
- DOROTHEA BRANDON (f)..... An older elegant ghost. Colonel
Brandon's maiden aunt.
(12 lines)
- ELIZABETH (f)..... A weepy ghost. One of John
Willoughby's cast-offs.
(12 lines)
- CLEMENTINE (f)..... Offstage voice. A Ghost.
Henry's first wife. (3 lines)

DURATION: 65 minutes.

TIME: Afternoon 1810.

SETTING: A country house in England.

COSTUMES

The story transpires in what is called the Regency Era and is great fun to costume. The only thing to keep in mind is that Elinor and Marianne cannot afford to dress as well as the other characters.

ELINOR – Simple day dress, ugly sash, and a robe.

MARIANNE – Simple day dress, ugly sash, and a robe.

DAISY – Maid attire.

FANNY – Wears a lot of jewelry.

EDWARD – A cravat.

PROPS

- Book
- Needlework
- Newspaper
- Bowl
- Calling Cards
- Teapot
- Tea Tray
- Five Tea Cups with Saucers
- Sugar Bowl
- Pocket Watch
- Letter
- Hair Brush
- Candles (Battery Operated)
- Crystal Ball
- Booklet
- Gift Box
- Basket
- Coin
- Chocolates
- Two Roses (optional)
- Flower Petals (optional)

SPECIAL EFFECTS

- Grandfather clock chimes three o'clock
- Three knocks
- European phone ringtone
- Wedding music

PRODUCTION NOTE

Marianne's has three styles of hair during the production: Long, Long with the right side chin length, and a bob. Elizabeth's hair is long with the right side chin length.

SET

The play unfolds on a single set which utilizes two raised platforms and a dividing “wall” down the center to distinguish the stage left front parlor of the country house from the stage right family parlor. The upstage end of the wall contains an arched doorway. The rest of the wall which continues almost all the way downstage is approximately 36" high but is treated by characters as if it extends all the way to the ceiling.

Stage right contains two high-backed comfy chairs and a table with an empty birdcage in front of a raised platform window that looks out on a pretty garden. Upstage right is a chair in front of a large painting, and an upstage door. A rounded table with a vase of flowers and folded newspaper is against the half-wall.

Upstage center on the second raised level is a small bedroom containing a bed, dresser and traveling trunk. A large window looks out on trees. The room is accessed by a door upstage left. A short staircase on the ground level upstage left leads to another door.

Stage left contains a love seat, chair and butler’s table. An angled entrance door is centerstage left. A grandfather clock is upstage of the door. Against the stage left wall is an antique table with a large mirror above it. A decorative urn and a small dish for calling cards are on the table.

Additional spotlight scenes can be played in aisles of the theater.



AT RISE: *ELINOR and MARIANNE are seated in the chairs in the family parlor. There are wearing simple day dresses. ELINOR is reading a book. A vexed MARIANNE is trying to focus on her needlework.*

MARIANNE: *(Defiant outburst.)* I hate it!

ELINOR: *(Calmly looking up.)* Come again?

MARIANNE: *(Throws her needlework down near ELINOR'S feet.)* I hate it, hate it, hate it! I hate it with every single fiber of my being from the very first moment I wake up to the very last moment I go to sleep. In fact, I absolutely cannot imagine hating anything more!

MARIANNE folds her arms, pouting. ELINOR sets aside her book to examine the discarded needlework.

ELINOR: It's not really all that bad. A few dropped stitches here and there but--

MARIANNE: That's not what I meant and you know it!

ELINOR: What, then?

MARIANNE: *(Leaps up and begins pacing.)* Isn't it as plain as the nose on my face? I hate everything about my life. It's dark. It's bleak. It's without any possible promise of improvement or happiness and it will remain like this for the rest of our woeful existence.

ELINOR: *(Has clearly heard this before.)* Oh. *(Resumes reading.)*

MARIANNE: Elinor! How can you just sit there and treat my complaint so dismissively? Your own life is just as empty and wretched.

ELINOR: Really? I suppose I hadn't noticed.

MARIANNE: *(Indicates birdcage.)* Even my dear little Malfoy no longer sings a song to cheer me out of my despondency.

ELINOR: *(Beat.)* You do recall he flew off two months ago when you left the window open?

MARIANNE: My point exactly. Even a bird-brain like Malfoy recognizes abject despair and hopelessness when he sees it. *(Heavy sigh.)* I do so hate being poor. It's the worst thing in the world, don't you think?

ELINOR: An understandable lament, darling, and I do empathize with your pain. But circumstances, sadly, were not within our control

when the light of Father's mortal existence was unexpectedly extinguished.

MARIANNE: But Father could have chosen differently, couldn't he? Why did he have to leave his entire fortune to his first wife's son and not to Mother and the two of us? Were we not the worthier recipients of new bonnets and shoes and a decent roof over our heads?

ELINOR: Perhaps it's just the way of the world, Marianne. Fathers believe their sons have keener minds than their daughters in matters of finance.

MARIANNE: Too bad he couldn't have foreseen how his greedy daughter-in-law would spend it hand-over-fist. Why only last week she had another armoire delivered! How many clothes does that horrible woman think she needs? It's as if she finds nothing unnatural about changing frocks ten times a day.

ELINOR: You must stop disparaging Fanny like that. She is family whether we like it or not. *(Resumes reading.)*

MARIANNE strolls to the vase of flowers on the table by the half-wall.

MARIANNE: I've been thinking.

ELINOR: An admirable distraction from your obsessions about Fanny's wardrobe. Thinking about what?

MARIANNE: Thinking perhaps we should find ourselves some jobs. *(Picks up newspaper next to vase of flowers.)* I've heard there's smart money to be made in employment.

ELINOR: Yes, but only if it's smart employment and one actually has useful skills that are in demand. Which, suffice it to say, we do not.

MARIANNE: Oh, stop being such a naysayer when I'm trying to be brutally serious.

ELINOR: Were you? I hadn't noticed. Besides--

MARIANNE: Besides what?

ELINOR: Young ladies of our age don't pursue jobs.

MARIANNE: Why not?

ELINOR: Because it's unseemly. Our role is to make ourselves decorative and pursue eligible husbands.

MARIANNE: *(Perusing newspaper.)* Nonsense! There's no reason that we can't-- *(Excited.)* Hello! What's this?

ELINOR: What's what?

MARIANNE: Have you got a tuppence I can borrow?

ELINOR: (*Sets aside her book to join her.*) And what do you intend to buy with a tuppence?

MARIANNE: (*Happily.*) A way out of our despair! Here, read this.

ELINOR: (*Reading from the newspaper.*) "How to Have Séances at Home. For the cost of a tuppence, our easy-to-read booklet teaches everything one must know about séances for fun, profit and spiritual closure." (*To MARIANNE.*) Have you gone quite mad? This is silly.

MARIANNE: Silly to give comfort to those who want to know how their dearly departeds are getting on in the afterlife? Even better, we don't even have to leave the house. We can hold our séances right here.

ELINOR: I can't believe Mrs. Jennings would allow such a foolish and flighty enterprise.

MARIANNE: Pffft! She hardly even notices we're around.

MRS. JENNINGS: (*Enters from the upstage center archway and approaches them.*) Oh, there you are, girls. I've been looking all over.

ELINOR AND MARIANNE: Good afternoon, Mrs. Jennings.

MRS. JENNINGS: Mrs. Ferrars and her daughter are coming to tea in a few moments. Do put on your best tea frocks and join us.

ELINOR and MARIANNE exchange a look.

ELINOR: Actually, these are the best tea frocks we own.

MRS. JENNINGS: Tsk, tsk. How insensitive of me. I keep forgetting you're poor as church mice, aren't you? No matter, though. Perhaps you can accessorize and no one will be the wiser.

MRS. JENNINGS exits. ELINOR gives the newspaper a second look as the lights go down. A spotlight comes up center aisle where EDWARD is shaking hands with WILLOUGHBY.

EDWARD: Mr. Willoughby!

WILLOUGHBY: Mr. Ferrars! (*Correcting himself.*) A thousand pardons. Edward. I remember your disdain for courtesy titles.

EDWARD: May I call you John, then?

WILLOUGHBY: Willoughby is fine.

EDWARD: As you wish. To what do I owe this unexpected pleasure?

EDWARD ties his cravat during the following. He's preparing to go out.

WILLOUGHBY: I depart for London Friday next and thought perhaps we could have ourselves a proper catchup.

EDWARD: Excellent. Business matters to attend in the fine city?

WILLOUGHBY: Actually the search for a wealthy heiress. One hundred thousand pounds a year, at least, should suffice. Or perhaps two hundred. I am not particular.

EDWARD: Always with the dowry, Willoughby. It is possible to marry for true love, you know.

WILLOUGHBY: Beg your pardon? Your words were muted by the silver spoon rattling against your teeth.

EDWARD: That spoon is grasped firmly by Mother. Quite often she gives it a little twist. *(Deflating.)* Like a knife. *(Sighs.)* In one's back.

An awkward pause.

WILLOUGHBY: *(Clears his throat.)* Your other family. Are they well?

EDWARD: Robert is spoiled like milk, as most younger siblings are. Fanny is...well, Fanny.

WILLOUGHBY: Oh, dear.

EDWARD: But they are in excellent health. Thank you for inquiring.

WILLOUGHBY: Shall we find ourselves a pleasant diversion, then? A tavern meal sounds most appealing to me. Plus I seem to recollect that it's your turn to buy.

EDWARD: Curious but I don't recollect that at all.

WILLOUGHBY: Well, if it's too much trouble--

EDWARD: No, no. It's just that Mother and Fanny are having tea at a friend's. I have been tasked to collect them at three.

WILLOUGHBY: *(Shrugs.)* So arrive late.

EDWARD: On purpose?

WILLOUGHBY: Perhaps by then, they will have found another way home.

EDWARD: How? One cannot simply summon a carriage with the press of a button. *(Wistful.)* Someday, perhaps.

WILLOUGHBY: You think too much, Edward. After the tavern we shall pop by tea house and offer our regrets. Smile warmly. Give them the unabashed sparkle of a wink in the eye. All shall be forgiven.

EDWARD: Willoughby, you have more angles than a protractor.

WILLOUGHBY: Is that a yes?

EDWARD: It is a maybe.

EDWARD ponders his next move as the spotlight goes out center aisle. The lights come up in the front parlor. MRS. JENNINGS is serving tea to MRS. FERRARS and FANNY.

MRS. JENNINGS: Sugar, Mrs. Ferrars?

MRS. FERRARS: Is it imported?

MRS. JENNINGS: From the kitchen, yes.

MRS. FERRARS: Regrettably, I must decline. I consume sugar only if it derives from the East Indies.

MRS. JENNINGS: I see. Fanny? Sugar?

MRS. FERRARS: *(Before FANNY can respond for herself.)* Absolutely not.

FANNY, dejected, lowers her tea cup. A shamed MRS. JENNINGS hides the sugar bowl as ELINOR and MARIANNE enter from upstage archway. Hideous sashes now adorn their dresses. ELINOR and MARIANNE curtsy.

MRS. JENNINGS: Do I hear Elinor and Marianne? Are they not lovely? *(Sees sashes, stifles scream.)* Though perhaps not at the moment.

MARIANNE: *(Sotto, to MRS. JENNINGS.)* You said to "accessorize!"

MRS. JENNINGS: *(Sotto, to MARIANNE.)* Not with the draperies!

ELINOR: I rather like our sashes. They are unique.

FANNY: Indeed, it is not a look for everyone. *(Beat.)* Speaking of frightful appearances, how is your dear mother? She always has a "prior engagement" whenever we are around.

ELINOR: Mamma sends her regrets. She is at the, um...

MARIANNE: Apothecary. She fell ill simply thinking about this visit.

ELINOR looks daggers at MARIANNE.

FANNY: Charming.

MRS. FERRARS: Mrs. Jennings. (*off ELINOR and MARIANNE.*) Pray, have you found suitable husbands yet for this sorry lot?

MRS. JENNINGS: No, but it is my greatest challenge to date.

FANNY: I am not surprised. One is infinitely more marriageable if one has wealth.

MRS. FERRARS: Or an amiable disposition.

FANNY: Or good breeding. None of which is evident here.

MARIANNE: Are these magic sashes, Elinor? They appear to have made us invisible.

DAISY enters from stage left door with a tea tray and two tea cups.

DAISY: (*To ELINOR.*) Tea, miss?

ELINOR: Thank you, Daisy.

ELINOR takes both tea cups, handing one to MARIANNE. DAISY exits.

ELINOR: Daisy saw us. We must still exist.

MRS. JENNINGS: And speaking of marriage, Mrs. Ferrars, have you found brides for your own two sons?

In the line below, ELINOR leans in closer to listen at the mention of "Edward."

MRS. FERRARS: Not at present. Robert, the charmer, will not lack for female companionship. It is dear Edward, however, who is our priority.

FANNY: And concern.

MRS. FERRARS: As the eldest, you know, he stands to inherit everything.

MRS. JENNINGS: (*Nodding in understanding.*) A gentleman of substance, as they say.

MRS. FERRARS: Indeed. And a fact not lost on every eligible young woman between here and London.

MRS. JENNINGS: He shall certainly have no shortage of brides from whom to choose.

FANNY: (*Interrupting.*) But he is wholly impractical! He values people for their character. How absurd.

MRS. JENNINGS: Speaking of Edward, I am reminded of a story...

MRS. JENNINGS, FANNY and MRS. FERRARS mime the rest of their conversation as MARIANNE pulls ELINOR aside.

MARIANNE: Elinor? Is something wrong? You are practically in Mrs. Jennings' lap.

ELINOR: (*Shushing her.*) They are talking about Edward.

MARIANNE: What matter can that possibly be to you?

ELINOR: None. I simply want to hear what they say.

MARIANNE: (*Realizing.*) You have a good opinion of him!

ELINOR: Our paths crossed once at Norland. I rather admire his mannerisms. His handsome looks. His kind smile.

MARIANNE: Pity there is no hope of winning his affection. Unless, of course, we suddenly inherit Buckingham House.

SFX: Grandfather clock chimes three o'clock. MRS. FERRARS plunks down her tea cup and stands.

MRS. FERRARS: Where is Edward? Honestly, he had but one task and has already failed. How are we to get home now?

MRS. JENNINGS: Our driver, Quentin, will be delighted to escort you. Come, let us summon the new barouche.

FANNY, MRS. JENNINGS and MRS. FERRARS exit stage left in a flurry.

ELINOR: (*Calling.*) Do come again!

MARIANNE: Upon my word, if they are going to be that way... (*Spots the sugar bowl that MRS. JENNINGS hid earlier.*) More for us.

MARIANNE heaps sugar into both her and ELINOR'S tea cup, as the lights go down in the parlor. A spotlight comes up in the center aisle where MRS. DASHWOOD is strolling with COLONEL BRANDON.

MRS. DASHWOOD: Your company is always such a pleasure, Colonel Brandon. Especially when it serves as an excuse to absent myself from the unpleasant likes of Fanny Ferrars and her domineering mother.

COLONEL BRANDON: (*Gallantly.*) You need never fashion an excuse for rescue, Mrs. Dashwood. I am at your call whenever the need arises.

MRS. DASHWOOD: You are a gentleman's gentleman, sir. One can only hope my daughters one day find husbands as worthy as you.

COLONEL BRANDON: How is that coming along, by the by? The husband-finding, that is?

MRS. DASHWOOD: As poorly as can be expected with two impoverished young ladies living on the parsd generosity of unkind and spiteful relatives.

COLONEL BRANDON: But certainly someone as beautifully radiant as Marianne...! (*Suddenly aware he's betraying his feelings.*) And, of course, someone as clever and intellectual as Elinor—

MRS. DASHWOOD: Your compliments about my daughters are most thoughtful, Colonel, and certainly spoken from the heart. But matrimony, it seems, is the purview of those with the resources to make it wildly successful. (*Beat.*) But enough about sorrow. I wonder what time it is.

COLONEL BRANDON: (*Withdraws his pocket watch.*) Quarter past the hour. Shall we be getting back?

MRS. DASHWOOD places her arm in COLONEL BRANDON'S.

MRS. DASHWOOD: Perhaps once more around the park if you don't mind. Just for good measure.

The spotlight goes out. Lights come up in the front parlor. DAISY is escorting WILLOUGHBY and EDWARD into the room.

DAISY: (*Indicates bowl.*) If you gentlemen will leave your cards, I shall see if Mrs. Jennings is receiving visitors.

EDWARD: It's actually my mother and sister I've come 'round to collect. Are they still about?

DAISY: Sorry, sir, but they left at three o'clock on the dot.

EDWARD: Oh drat.

WILLOUGHBY grins and elbows EDWARD.

DAISY: Will you be leaving then, sir?

EDWARD: Well, seeing as how they've already gone--

WILLOUGHBY: *(To DAISY.)* Some tea would make for lovely refreshment. Is that something a pretty maid like you might manage?

DAISY: Right away, sir. Yes, of course.

WILLOUGHBY: Delightful! By the by, have you a name?

DAISY: *(A little curtsy.)* Daisy, sir.

WILLOUGHBY: *(Thoughtfully repeats it.)* Daisy. Was there ever a name that tripped more sweetly off the lips and conjured thoughts of a summer's day by a sun-kissed babbling brook or a stroll down a lover's lane beneath a dappled canopy of trees!

DAISY: *(Confused.)* I – uh – wouldn't know, sir.

WILLOUGHBY: *(Kisses DAISY'S hand.)* Then you shall have to take my word for it.

DAISY giggles and exits, clearly giddy from this exchange.

EDWARD: A bit free with the liberties, are we?

WILLOUGHBY: Excuse me?

EDWARD: “A sun-kissed babbling brook”? “A dappled canopy of trees”? How do you come up with such things?

WILLOUGHBY: *(Shrugs.)* It's a gift.

EDWARD: All the same--

WILLOUGHBY: A man can request a cup of tea if he wishes.

EDWARD: In the house of a total stranger? Really, Willoughby, your lack of protocol is sometimes astonishing beyond words. *(Crosses to put a card in the bowl.)*

WILLOUGHBY: *(Sits on loveseat.)* If I'd had my wits, I would have asked for a slice of cake as well. In my defense, I was only doing you a favor. You can thank me later.

EDWARD: Thank you for what?

WILLOUGHBY: For giving your mum and sister a head-start. By the time you reach home, their annoyance with you will be all but

forgotten and they shall have moved on to another object of vexation.

EDWARD: Clearly I have misrepresented Mother's capacity to hold a grudge.

MARIANNE enters from upstage archway, calling back to ELINOR.

MARIANNE: There's always a loose tuppence or two falling between the cushions. I'm sure if I look--

MARIANNE is startled to see EDWARD and WILLOUGHBY. WILLOUGHBY immediately stands.

EDWARD: My apology for startling you, Miss...?

MARIANNE: Dashwood. Marianne Dashwood.

EDWARD: But, of course! I should have remembered that you and your sister are living here now.

MARIANNE: Through circumstances not of our choosing, Mr. ...?

EDWARD: Ferrars. Edward Ferrars. And this is my friend, John Willoughby.

WILLOUGHBY: *(A charming bow.)* Enchanted.

MARIANNE: *(Calling upstage like child.)* Elinor! *(To EDWARD.)* I believe my sister crossed paths with you at Norland.

EDWARD: An occasion I fondly recall that ended much too soon.

WILLOUGHBY: *(Chuckles.)* Secrets, Edward? How amusing.

ELINOR: *(Enters, breathless from upstage.)* Honestly, Marianne, there's no need to shout. *(Notices EDWARD and WILLOUGHBY. Startled.)* Oh my!

MARIANNE: Look who's here. It's Mr. Ferrars. You were just mentioning him, weren't you?

EDWARD: Allow me to introduce my friend, Mr. Willoughby.

WILLOUGHBY: Your little maid was about to bring tea. Care to join us?

MARIANNE: We'd love--

ELINOR: Regretfully, it is not seemly to entertain gentlemen without a proper chaperone. Come along, Marianne.

ELINOR and MARIANNE start to exit.

WILLOUGHBY: Marianne! Uh – forgive me, Miss Dashwood, but I believe we interrupted your search – for a lost tuppence, was it?

MARIANNE: (*Giggles.*) Oh, it's nothing really.

Unseen by the others, WILLOUGHBY deftly removes a coin from his pocket.

WILLOUGHBY: Perhaps it's this one? I discovered it just now in the cushions.

WILLOUGHBY holds the coin out and MARIANNE takes it as if he's handing her his heart.

MARIANNE: Thanks ever so, Mr. Willoughby.

WILLOUGHBY: It's entirely my pleasure. As will be the pleasure of calling on you again soon. Very. Very. Soon.

MARIANNE swoons and is caught by ELINOR as the lights go out. A light comes up in the center aisle. LUCY is reading a letter. ANNE, enters.

ANNE: What are you reading? Something I should know about?

LUCY: A letter has just come from our cousin, Mrs. Jennings. An invitation, in fact.

ANNE: An invitation to what?

LUCY: To visit at the country house for a few days. (*Fans herself.*) How lovely!

ANNE: How very crowded as well. Have you forgotten she already has guests in the form of Elinor and Marianne Dashwood?

LUCY: Ah yes, the poor, displaced relations who had nowhere else to go when their father left them penniless. But otherwise such beautiful, elegant, accomplished and agreeable young girls. Not unlike myself. Do you not agree, sister dear?

ANNE: I know that look in your eyes, Lucy. What are you up to?

LUCY: Why should we not want to visit a pair of kindred spirits, especially given their relationship with the Ferrars? Really, Anne! Your suspicious nature is most unflattering.

ANNE: What do you care about the Ferrars? You hardly even know them.

LUCY: (*Laughs.*) On the contrary! I know much more than you think.

ANNE: Have you got a secret up your sleeve?

LUCY: If I share it, do you promise not to tell?

ANNE: I suppose. What is it?

LUCY whispers in ANNE'S ear.

ANNE: (*Reacts in astonishment.*) Are you quite serious?

LUCY: (*A finger in warning.*) You promised not to tell.

The spotlight goes out on ANNE and LUCY. An eerie blue light comes up on the stage right parlor. The rounded table and chair have been moved downstage. A crystal ball and candles are on the table. MARIANNE is seated at the table and is reading aloud from a booklet.

MARIANNE: "To cultivate a proper and congenial relationship with the dearly departed, one must project a clear voice, a confident demeanor and the utmost of courtesy. Treat the spirits as kindly and respectfully as you would treat any acquaintances who are still among the living. Refrain from impolite or intrusive inquiries which might offend their sensibilities or incur their wrath." (*Satisfied that she understands what is required in a proper séance, she sets the book down, clears her throat and proceeds to focus on the crystal ball.*) Spirits in the Great Hereafters, Hanging 'round the creaky rafters. Though yourselves are long since dead, your stories may be still unread. So if you roam and feel unrest, tis time to get things off your chest. (*Peers into crystal ball and taps it.*) Hello? Hello? Is this thing on?

HENRY: (*Offstage.*) Hellooooooooo!

MARIANNE: (*Jumps.*) Oh my! Is someone truly there?

An eerie spotlight comes up in the window and we see the ghost of HENRY in formal attire. NOTE: In séance scenes, MARIANNE stays fixated on the crystal ball rather than any "visitors" in the window.

HENRY: Of course, I'm here. Who wants to know?

MARIANNE: (*Cautious.*) Kind spirit, identify yourself, please, to the one who has summoned you.

HENRY: Henry. Henry Dashwood.

MARIANNE: Father?!

HENRY: Marianne? Is that you? My goodness, young lady. What are you doing up at this hour?

MARIANNE: (*Under her breath.*) I can't believe it really worked. And on my very first try.

HENRY: Speak up! You know how I abhor mumblers. Always have, always will.

MARIANNE: Uh...it's good to hear your voice, Father. Elinor and I have missed you desperately since your...untimely passing.

HENRY: Yes, well, such is life. And death. Was there something you wanted? I don't have all day, you know.

MARIANNE: But isn't eternity supposed to be timeless?

HENRY: Not if one is industrious and fills it up.

CLEMENTINE: (*Offstage.*) Henry! We'll be late!

MARIANNE: Who's that?

HENRY: Uh... no one you know. As you were saying?

CLEMENTINE: (*Offstage.*) Henry!

HENRY: Be there in a moment, Clementine.

MARIANNE: Clementine? Wasn't that your wife before Mother? What are you doing with her?

HENRY: Seeing as how she and I are both departed, why should our celestial reconnection be a surprise?

MARIANNE: But Mother still mourns for you. We all do. On that account, should you not be as bereft and lonely as we are? Not to mention wracked with guilt for leaving us homelessly destitute and without any prospects for marriage?

CLEMENTINE: (*Offstage.*) Come along, darling! Our friends are waiting!

HENRY: It was good hearing from you, Marianne. Give my regards to Elinor.

The spotlight goes out on HENRY.

MARIANNE: Well that was most unsettling.

The lights go down in the parlor. A spotlight comes up in the aisle where LUCY "happens" to bump into EDWARD. He's carrying a small gift box.

LUCY: Mr. Ferrars! What a delightful, completely unplanned surprise.

Here I was walking along on a beautiful day by myself, not expecting to encounter a single soul I knew, and— well, here you are!

EDWARD: *(A bow of acknowledgment.)* The pleasure is mine, Miss Steele.

LUCY: And how is your lovely and distinguished family? Everyone is well, I hope?

EDWARD: Very well. Robert is come to realize that as second son, he has no inheritance. Mother reminds him of this hourly. Fanny is... well, Fanny.

LUCY: Oh, dear.

EDWARD: Why does everyone keep saying that? *(Remembering gift box.)* Forgive me, Miss Steele, but I must take my leave. These sweets for Mrs. Jennings will not deliver themselves.

LUCY: On the contrary! My sister and I make for Barton Park this very afternoon. Allow us to present them on your behalf.

EDWARD: *(Clutching the gift box, not sure of this.)* But --

LUCY: *(A little too eager.)* Please? *(Intense.)* I insist.

EDWARD: But Mother requested this task of me. To thank the Jennings for use of their carriage.

LUCY: I shall tell them in no uncertain terms.

EDWARD: *(Lost in thought.)* Elinor is now at Barton Park. Perhaps you two shall become better acquainted.

LUCY: You know Elinor? *(Tightest of smiles.)* On a first name basis?

EDWARD: We have met in passing.

LUCY: Of course. And you were forced to engage in pleasant conversation. How awful. *(Pats EDWARD'S hand.)* There, there.

EDWARD: Actually, I rather enjoyed our --

LUCY: No time for details! Mrs. Jennings awaits.

LUCY grabs the gift box and exits. On EDWARD'S befuddlement, the spotlight goes out center aisle. The lights come up in the front parlor. ROBERT, MRS. FERRARS and MRS. JENNINGS are sipping tea, in stony silence.

MRS. JENNINGS: (*Beat.*) My, but we do drink frightening amounts of tea.

MRS. FERRARS: It passes the time. Please remind me, why did the Miss Dashwoods choose this particular hour for their walk? Do they not know who we are?

ROBERT: Disinterested guests?

MRS. FERRARS: Silence, Robert, I am doing this for you. Both sisters are your age. Both without prospects. Both completely penniless. Sound familiar?

ROBERT: Mother, you flatter me. But I am quite capable of meeting poor people on my own.

MRS. FERRARS: Are you? I had not noticed.

ROBERT: Because you are too busy marrying off King Edward the Great.

MRS. FERRARS gives ROBERT a death stare.

ROBERT: Did I say that aloud? Pity.

An awkward pause.

MRS. JENNINGS: Oolong, anyone? (*Pours tea.*) My cousins, Anne and Lucy, will be here directly. Both are delightful young women. And neither of them as yet spoken for. Did I mention that?

MRS. JENNINGS gives ROBERT a nudge.

ROBERT: Thank you, Mrs. Jennings, I am over-caffeinated but fine. When the right lady comes along, I shall know instantly.

LUCY enters, with gift box. ROBERT is smitten with LUCY.

MRS. JENNINGS: Lucy! A pleasure to see you!

LUCY: Likewise, dear cousin. Hello, Mrs. Ferrars. (*Completely glosses over ROBERT and takes a seat.*)

MRS. JENNINGS: (*Notices gift box.*) I see you brought a little prop.

LUCY gives the gift box to MRS. JENNINGS.

LUCY: For you. From me. For the sweet kindness of your hospitality.

MRS. JENNINGS: Oh, you need not have troubled yourself.

LUCY: It actually was no trouble at all. (*Helps herself to some tea.*)

MRS. JENNINGS: Modest and kind! Can you believe it, Mrs. Ferrars?

It is not every young woman these days who takes the time to do good deeds and consider the happiness and welfare of others.

MRS. FERRARS: I can assure you, Mrs. Jennings, my own children are equally obliging. Especially Edward.

LUCY sits bolt upright.

MRS. FERRARS: (*To MRS. JENNINGS.*) Did I mention he might come to call? In fact, I expect him to make an appearance at any moment.

LUCY: Perhaps I should put these in the kitchen.

LUCY stands and grabs the gift box from MRS. JENNINGS. ROBERT leaps to his feet.

ROBERT: Allow me to assist. The box looks exceedingly heavy for one so fragile and delicate. (*Exits after LUCY.*)

MRS. JENNINGS: Poor dear. I do hope he finds someone soon.

MRS. FERRARS: (*Takes a long sip of tea.*) He has no inheritance, you know.

The lights go down in the front parlor. A spotlight comes up in the center aisle as WILLOUGHBY sidles up to EDWARD.

WILLOUGHBY: Edward, you have the stamina of an ox. Did I not see you walking with the lovely Miss Steele earlier today?

EDWARD: Merely a coincidence. We were headed in the same direction. (*Beat, clarifying.*) South.

WILLOUGHBY: (*Teasing.*) I should hope Miss Dashwood does not hear of this little circumstance. I suspect it would devastate her beyond measure and send her into a sulk.

EDWARD: Elinor is sensible and kind. She would not be distressed in the slightest that I was engaged in innocent conversation.

WILLOUGHBY: So I may tell her?

EDWARD: It would please me if you refrained. Our relationship is... complicated.

WILLOUGHBY: Ah. Invisible dowry will do that.

EDWARD: What a cynic you are!

WILLOUGHBY: Perhaps. But it goes without saying that money makes the world go 'round. It buys a house in the country. A house in the city. A stable of thoroughbred horses. A season at the opera. Inclusion in the finest clubs.

EDWARD: And what do you know of such things?

WILLOUGHBY: Enough to know that I want them. Quite desperately. It's a gentleman's life to which I could easily grow accustomed.

EDWARD: Well, money is of no consequence to me. And I am so little at ease with gentility. It is my sincere hope to one day marry for love.

WILLOUGHBY: *(Laughs.)* Oh. You are quite serious. *(Aghast.)* Why??

EDWARD: It is foolish, in my opinion, to silence the desires of the heart. When one meets a kindred spirit, the other half of one's soul and destiny has no choice but to go forth boldly, to declare one's intentions and to live the proverbial happily ever after.

WILLOUGHBY: *(Briefly mulls this over.)* Perhaps you are right and a visit to Barton Park is in order. I think I should like to call on Miss Marianne.

EDWARD: *(Did not mean to do this.)* Err -- is that quite wise? Marianne has recently lost her beloved father. She needs space. And she is terribly busy... *(Thinks.)* Washing her hair! Yes. One strand at a time.

WILLOUGHBY: A distraction named "Willoughby" can help. All harmless fun, Edward. Not to worry.

WILLOUGHBY claps EDWARD on the back and exits quickly out the center aisle.

EDWARD: *(Calling off to WILLOUGHBY.)* But worrying is what I do best!

A big, worried face-palm from EDWARD as the spotlight goes out center aisle. The lights come up in the front parlor where COLONEL

BRANDON is waiting. A moment later, MRS. JENNINGS bustles into the room.

MRS. JENNINGS: Colonel Brandon! I had no idea you'd be dropping by. What a delight!

COLONEL BRANDON: Nor did I know my own intentions until my footsteps led me to your front gate.

MRS. JENNINGS: How cheery! I shall ring Daisy to bring us some tea.

COLONEL BRANDON: Actually, I had just stopped by to - uh - inquire after the young ladies. Getting all settled in, are they? Not in need of anything...or anyone?

MRS. JENNINGS: No, no, not a bit. Lucy and Anne have taken as swimmingly to Barton Park as ducklings to water.

COLONEL BRANDON: What I meant to say – or rather, ask – was about the other young ladies in your gracious charge. The Miss Dashwoods?

MRS. JENNINGS: Oh. Them. Well, what can one really say except that they're alarmingly unexceptional – a condition not uncommon among those with neither title nor resources to attract a smart match. *(Heavy sigh.)* I fear I shall be stuck with them for eternity.

COLONEL BRANDON: But certainly I should think that her – or, rather, their fair looks and sweet dispositions would win the heart of any man who values substance over material possessions.

MRS. JENNINGS: *(Giggles.)* Oh, Colonel Brandon. Your silliness at making jokes is sometimes at such odds with your strict demeanor.

COLONEL BRANDON: Indeed.

The lights go out in the parlor and come up in the center aisle where ELINOR and MARIANNE have encountered EDWARD. MARIANNE carries a basket.

ELINOR: Mr. Ferrars. What a pleasant surprise. You remember my sister, Marianne?

EDWARD: Charmed, yes. You're looking well. Both of you – that is. Quite well indeed. *(Beat.)* Fine weather we're having, wouldn't you say? Not too hot. Not too cold. If this day were a bowl of porridge, it would be just right.

ELINOR: Yes. Quite. I'd not thought of it that way but now that you mention it--

MARIANNE: (*Unable to contain herself.*) Have you seen your friend Mr. Willoughby?

ELINOR: Marianne--

MARIANNE: We were talking just now about mentioning things. I was only inquiring if Mr. Willoughby might have mentioned me in casual or intentional passing.

ELINOR: Yes, dear, but do you really think such outbursts are entirely appropriate?

EDWARD: Actually, Miss Dashwood, he did mention you with the intention of perhaps calling this afternoon.

MARIANNE squeals in glee, thrusts the basket into ELINOR'S hands and runs off before ELINOR can stop her.

EDWARD: I take it your sister was rather pleased to hear this bit of news about Mr. Willoughby?

ELINOR: Marianne is easily excitable. I do hope it doesn't frighten the poor man off.

EDWARD: If I might speak candidly...?

ELINOR: But, of course. What are friends for if not to speak their minds without fear of censure?

EDWARD: The truth of it is, I believe your sister could do much better than the likes of John Willoughby. Much, much better.

ELINOR: You speak as if you had someone else in mind.

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