

JANE AUSTEN'S NEW PLAY AND SEX LIFE  
– a play by DANIEL CURZON

CHARACTERS: (8)

JANE AUSTEN, about 40, female, the British author  
HANS-AXL, 25-45, male, Swiss-German, Jane's “care-giver”  
MRS. NURAHNI, female, 25-35, a conservative next-door neighbor  
UTILITY ACTOR #1, 40-60, to play various roles  
UTILITY ACTRESS # 1, 40-60, to play various roles  
UTILITY ACTOR #2, 20-40, to play other roles  
UTILITY ACTRESS # 2, 20-40, to play other roles  
NIGEL, male, 30-55, a member of the press

SETTING: The Present

(Enter Jane Austen in clothes from 1810)

JANE: Hello, my name is Jane, Jane Austen. Welcome to my living room. I'm afraid I have been out of circulation for some time. Some two hundred years in fact. But who's counting?! Time flies when you've had cryo-preservation like I have done! Don't ask! With the assistance of my care-giver, dear Hans-Axl, from Swizzerland, where I was “staying,” I am back home now. (Enter Hans-Axl, to take a bow.) You see, I wish to write my very first real play since childhood. So here I am! And here you are! If the play does not go well, I can always return to my . . . “freezer.” No, let's not go there! The play's the thing! We're working on it as we speak! I hope that you will permit me to indulge my appetite for a bit of a *roman a clef* in what unfolds. I'm not saying who! I have hired a few menials to play the parts. (Waves to offstage actors)

UTILITY ACTOR #1: (looking in) Menials?

JANE: I mean “mechanicals” – local greengrocers, butcher boys, milkmaids. All amateur but very talented.

UTILITY ACTOR #1: That's better.

JANE: I will take pains to hide the true identities of the characters they play, naturally, not wishing to libel anyone (Ha! Ha! as Han-Axl would say.)

HANS-AXL: (too loudly) HA! HA!

JANE: Yet what can be more alluring than knowing a true story lies behind the scheme that is a novel or a play, yes? Who these characters are based on I doubt you will know, nor ever be able to decipher. Their true identity hardly matters as they all fade into history (as we all do – you more than me perhaps). All that will remain is the art they inhabit. May my poor, perhaps fading, powers do them justice, although, for some, that justice might be harsh. But you judge who deserves to be judged! Shall we? . . .

(All the Utility Actors have “sides” with their parts on them to use while acting.)

(Enter Caroline Joyce, played by the Utility Actress #2 to act out as much of this narrative as possible onstage, alternating with Jane's narration, underlining or playing counter to the text.)

Be it noted that Caroline Joyce Smith had already reached her mid-twenties when she met Russell Daniel Braun. It was at an unfashionable small, private school where they were both instructors in the Mother-tongue.

(Enter Russell Daniel.)

He too was in his mid-twenties, and it must be said that she surpassed him in maturity at that time, being a successful scholar and budding fiction authoress, although unknown to most, while Russell Daniel was still finding his footing, having written very little.

(Russell Daniel stumbles.)

Still, he too harboured ambitions about making a name for himself in the world of Literature, which at that time was still possible. People actually read books and discussed them as if they were consequential. It is hard to envision such a distant time, but it did indeed once exist, long, long ago.

(Both Caroline Joyce and Russell Daniel mime writing with a quill.)

Unmarried when she met Russell Daniel, Caroline Joyce was supposedly engaged to a certain Raymond Raymond, an older instructor at another unfashionable private school in the nearby town of W. . . At her age, she had cause to wonder if she would ever find a husband, for truth be told, she was not a pretty young woman, though one certainly noticed her. She had penetrating eyes and an aloof manner. Her most outstanding feature was her large Jewess's nose, an odd feature since she was a Roman Catholic.

CAROLINE: Oh, dear!

JANE: *What?*

CAROLINE: We'll discuss it later.

JANE: To continue: She hated to be considered unaccomplished in any way, shape, or form and went out of her way to seem serious and intellectual. Most people thought that she had no sense of humor whatsoever. But she did have a cruel eye, which she kept for her private journals and the early drafts of her fiction. She revealed very little of herself in conversation, for she considered the world both insane and nasty and most people stupid and capable of the most vicious barbarities.

(Caroline Joyce nods. She now shows the traits next described here.)

CONT'D.

She also suffered from attacks of Sudden Panic, her heart racing, her eyelids fluttering, even a certain agitation of the eyeballs. These would come at the most inopportune moments. It must be said, overall, that her high intelligence and her emotional vulnerability made her live on tenterhooks at all times, making her cautious, haughty, and devoid of charm.

(Russell Daniel nods agreement, reluctantly.)

In fact, she was not so much haughty as terrified of the world she found herself in. Many in her world wondered if she had become engaged to this Raymond Raymond not so much out of love but as a means, any means, to protect herself from the charge of being a spinster and to being overwhelmed, crushed, and dismissed by the world.

(Caroline Joyce lets out a scream. enter Utility Actor #1 as Raymond Raymond. Caroline grabs hold of him in desperation.)

LIGHTS OUT

LIGHTS UP on CAROLINE and RUSSELL DANIEL

JANE: When Russell Daniel first met Caroline Joyce it was in the fall. They were both at the Registration table for the unfashionable co-educational Catholic school where they were employed.

(The two sit side by side at a table.)

Co-educational institutions were a relatively rare phenomenon at the time, as were Roman Catholic institutions of "higher learning" (a term not so oxymoronic as it might appear at first). It was part of their official duties to sign in as many students as possible, as, the school's being Catholic, enrollment was a continuing problem. Russell Daniel had joined the Mother-tongue Faculty the previous year and felt a little more at ease at Registration than did Miss Smith.

(He looks at ease; she does not.)

Russell Daniel was a very attractive young man, but he never thought of himself as physically appealing.

(He demurs.)

He was charming and self-effacing, not aware that his smile and warm demeanor were very appealing to many others.

(Caroline Joyce looks at Russell Daniel with interest.)

His naivete was no doubt a large part of his attractiveness. He had been bookish as a lad and already had achieved a Master of Arts Degree at the age of twenty-three. It was not from either Oxford or Cambridge, but it was from a respectable school and probably harder won, to tell the truth. Caroline Joyce found herself glancing at him from time as they waited for students to approach. Naturally, she said nothing to him, as that would have been too forward.

(She looks at him, then away. Russell Daniel notices but says nothing.)

JANE: Eventually, he said something to her.

RUSSELL: You must be new this year.

CAROLINE: I suppose I am.

JANE: Said she.

RUSSELL: (ironically) Are you enjoying our fair city?

CAROLINE: Is this city fair? I hadn't noticed!

RUSSELL: I merely meant –

CAROLINE: I'm sure you did!

JANE: Russell Daniel was surprised and put off by her abruptness. Who was this icy lady and was it worth this small talk to get to know her? He was tempted to move further down the table, but that would have been impolite and unequivocal. (Russell starts to get up.) Instead, he chose to plow on with some more polite small talk.

(He sits back down.)

RUSSELL: And where were you before you came here?

JANE: Be it noted that he did not at all care where she may have been before.

CAROLINE: I was in the southern part of the country, at Protestant College. I was working on my doctorate.

RUSSELL: Were you? I understand that Protestant College is an excellent school.

CAROLINE: Have you? Well, it isn't!

JANE: Replied Caroline Joyce. My word! thought Russell Daniel. What a severe, stiff young woman. And so very plain as well.

RUSSELL: I suppose she cannot help the plainness, but she can help the abrasiveness of her demeanor.

CAROLINE: I did not continue work on that degree. I have a Master's degree from Cambridge, one of the few women ever to get one. It took a special dispensation.

RUSSELL: May I take the liberty of saying how wonderful for you!?

CAROLINE: I do not care to be at this school either, but positions are few and far between.

RUSSELL: That is very true. I got mine last year because some other faculty member took a sudden leave. I can only remain for three years. I may have to earn a doctorate myself to get a permanent position, somewhere.

CAROLINE: Do you think you can actually do it?

JANE: Said she, turning away.

RUSSELL: What does that mean?

JANE: He wondered. Was she insulting him, implying that he was too stupid to get a doctorate, or did she mean something else?

(Russell looks perplexed.)

Again he wanted to flee from this woman, but his innate good manners and unwillingness to think the worst of people upon a first impression caused him to stay in his chair.

(Caroline is looking off. After some indecision, Russell stays put.)

LIGHTS OUT on ALL  
LIGHTS UP on JANE

JANE: To Be Continued! . . . Well, what do you think so far? I think this is a nice twist on my meeting between Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*, don't you? Only here it is the *female* who is standoffish and aloof and the man who is likable, good-natured, and sensible. Is it clear that Caroline Joyce is becoming attracted to Russell Daniel despite her engagement to another man? But perhaps that engagement may face an unseen obstacle, perhaps, perhaps?? I await *your* first impression! Suggestions may be left at the box office later. Thank you.

CAROLINE : Miss Austen, may I suggest something?

JANE: Oh, what might that be?

CAROLINE: I think it works quite well in setting up a possible scenario for these two characters. However, there may be too much narration, and I would not describe the woman's nose as a "Jewess's." It might not go over all that well.

JANE: Why cannot I say her nose looks like a Jewess's if it indeed does?

CAROLINE: I am afraid calling attention to "ethnic" traits is only permissible now if done with flattery. I don't think you meant to be unflattering. But trust me, let's not risk it.

JANE: What absolute rubbish! Can I say somebody looks "British"? How about "French"? There are *such* things, you realise!

CAROLINE: Yes, you may use “British,” “French,” and “German,” but not “Jewish.” And definitely not “Jewess.” “Negress” is likewise out of fashion.

JANE: You and your modern times mystify me. Yet I will abide by your advice. What else am I not allowed to say? I can, as you imagine, hardly wait to find out! I thought in *my* day that there were many unmentionable things. I see now that your time has its own. I have gotten the impression that some around me feel that my Age was quite mealy-mouthed and prudish. I am beginning to think your Age is not all that different. Only the specifics have altered. But I appreciate your concern. Shall we continue? (to Utility Actor #1) Hello there! Could you show them the horse since they can't see the pasture outside?

(Enter Utility Actor #1 as the horse. He does as Jane describes.)

JANE: Bouncer that wonderful horse belonging to my neighbours, outside in the lower pasture, is rubbing against an apple tree. Pardon me, but the area of his anatomy that he is rubbing leads me to believe he is in love. With the apple tree! And Bouncer a gelding too!

(The horse rubs and whinnies.)

JANE: Ah, the “picturesque”! I love Nature so!

UTIL. ACTOR #1: Do you like my whinny? Rest assured I will not ask to be listed as co-author!

JANE: Why would you think, even for a moment, that I would list you as co-author? Have you written any of the words? (to Utility Actress #2) It seems to me that being a “deleter” of words is hardly the same thing, is it? I pray that you are not entertaining hidden thoughts about taking credit for my work. If I really thought that, I might have to . . . But never mind. Shall we continue with the play? . . . A week to the day after last speaking to Caroline Joyce, Russell Daniel spied her in the college's dining hall.

(Russell Daniel does so and then attempts to turn away, but the Department Head (played by Utility Actor #1) signals for him to come over.)

She was sitting not alone, but with the Head of their department, a certain Professor Percival Blossom, a be-spectacled, angular gentleman of independent wealth, who was said to receive but one pound a year in salary. Russell Daniel did not wish to pursue any further interaction with Miss Smith, as she was so ‘what she was’ at their initial meeting, yet because the Head had signaled him to join them, that left Russell Daniel no choice.

RUSSELL: (dropping into an empty chair at the table) Good day. It is crowded in here, is it not? And warm.

BLOSSOM: I thought you might need a place to sit.

JANE: Professor Blossom opined. He was buttering a crumpet lavishly.

(He is doing so, mimed.)

RUSSELL: Most thoughtful of you.

BLOSSOM: It was, was it not! I also wanted to arrange with you for me to visit your freshman class, when it is convenient of course. But soon, I hope. I just visited Miss Smith's class, and I was reminded that indeed *mens agitat molem!* My mind, your matter!

JANE: He speared one of the cold meats with his fork.

(He does.)

BLOSSOM: I assume you two have been introduced – *pari passu*.

JANE: Russell Daniel caught Caroline Joyce's eye and thought he detected a slight roll of her eye at the supercilious tone of Professor Blossom, who was given to quaint, overly confidential leanings toward others, while dropping Latin and Greek expressions as if those ancient languages were a sign of deep intimacy.

BLOSSOM: (intimately to Caroline) *Mirabile visu!*

JANE: He was also known to be a vicious enemy and since he alone had the main say in whether new faculty were let go or retained, his good opinion could not be done without.

CAROLINE: I trust that means you enjoyed my class a little, Professor Blossom.

BLOSSOM: Oh, I did, I did. Did not my use of Latin convey that?

CAROLINE: (crisply) I'm afraid my Latin is rusty.

BLOSSOM: Really? One must keep it sharp, boys and girls! Standards, you know. Standards.

JANE: Russell Daniel was shocked to hear her add:

CAROLINE: It seems to me that Latin may be on its way out.

JANE: Professor Blossom was likewise shocked.

BLOSSOM: Latin? Out? What can you be thinking, Miss Smith?! We shall always have Latin. I am not entirely sure about Greek, but always Latin. Trust me on that.

JANE: He took a bite of his crumpet, and some butter spilled out onto his bottom lip. (He mimes it.) Caroline Joyce said no more on the subject, realising that she had best not antagonise her superior. She took a sip from her water goblet and then stared down at the tablecloth. (She mimes this.) Russell Daniel agreed with her about Latin, and he thought it rather brave of her to say such a thing in such a time and place. He had neglected his own Latin shamefully and hoped against hope that it would die out, perhaps in his lifetime.

RUSSELL: Would you care to attend my class next Thursday in the morning at eight?

JANE: Asked he of Professor Blossom.

BLOSSOM: Perfect! I am always at my best bright and early in the day. Rise and shine! *Surrexit ergo, et luceant!*

RUSSELL: I am as well. I cannot say as much for the students, however.

JANE: He noticed that as Caroline Joyce looked up at him, a faint, pert smile presented itself around her mouth.

BLOSSOM: Our students are quite fine, at any hour of the day. I find that if I quote plenty of Latin, Greek, and occasional Sanskrit to them, they are entranced, so entranced they hardly know what to say. But I know they are moved! It is deeply, deeply gratifying to me as their instructor.

JANE: Russell Daniel let the matter drop as well. He looked around for one of the wait staff.

RUSSELL: I am quite starved. I wonder if I shall get anything to eat today.

JANE: All the staff were occupied and ignored him.

BLOSSOM: Miss Smith has not touched her boiled pudding, I am quite certain. Perhaps she will give it to you.

JANE: Professor Blossom looked from one to the other. Miss Smith of course coloured in embarrassment at such an indelicate choice of phrasing, as did Russell Daniel; however, the Professor did not seem to notice anything inappropriate and pushed him again to share Caroline Joyce's uneaten "pudding."

RUSSELL: No thank you. I have two plums and some tripe in my office. I can have those. They will serve.

BLOSSOM: How silly! Eat Miss Smith's pudding! It's just going to waste! Always it should be *pro re nata*. "As the situation arises."

CAROLINE: I may have, in fact, touched my spoon to it.

JANE: Caroline Joyce demurred.

BLOSSOM: No, upon my honour, you did not. I have sat here and watched you the entire time. I believe it is a mortal sin to waste good food. Surrender your boiled pudding to Mr. Braun, and not another word about it!

JANE: Needless to say, Russell Daniel felt compelled to take the pudding.



RUSSELL: I shall have it in my office.

JANE: Said he, wrapping it carefully in a clean kerchief from his pocket. (He does.)

BLOSSOM: *Nunc est bibendum!* “Now is the time to drink.” True, one does not exactly drink boiled pudding; still, the meaning is close enough, is it not? I always maintain that anything can be said better in Latin. And when it comes to witticisms, can anything out-do ancient Greek? But employ Sanskrit when you seriously want to flay them with wit!

CAROLINE: Oh! I have an appointment to keep with a student of mine. Excuse me.

(She leaves hurriedly.)

JANE: He could not be certain, but Russell Daniel thought he heard a loud laugh emerge from her as she was leaving the dining hall, with her fist pressed against her mouth.

(We hear the stifled laugh.)

He waited for Professor Blossom to finish his lunch, out of deference, and as a reward was treated to several Greek and Sanskrit puns.

BLOSSOM: Did you get that one?

LIGHTS OUT on BLOSSOM and RUSSELL DANIEL

LIGHTS UP on RUSSELL DANIEL in his room, grading papers, mimed

JANE: After lunch, Russell Daniel began to mark a set of essays written by his students. They were supposed to write about the place of Christ in their lives (since it was a Catholic school, a topic suggested by the Administrators and possibly the Pope), but after the fifth essay in a row about the “Blessed Blood of the Lamb,” his eyes began to blur. He did not know whether to suspect plagiarism or a uniformity of mind-set. The flawed spelling, punctuation, and grammar further distracted him from his task. He yawned several times and put his marking pen down and rubbed his forehead from side to side. When he looked up, Caroline Joyce was standing in his doorway, the door already being slightly ajar.

(She appears.)

Perhaps it was the afternoon light, but she looked less plain than usual and, if not poised, at least graceful, indeed almost elegant. Her eyes, as always, drew one’s focus with their intensity. For a moment it seemed that she would change her mind and withdraw without speaking a word, but then she said:

CAROLINE: What did you make of Professor Blossom today?

JANE: The way she asked it made it seem that it was not simple curiosity but perhaps a snare of some sort.

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RUSSELL: I think he means . . . well.

CAROLINE: Do you?

JANE: Caroline Joyce's face was doubtful.

RUSSELL: You do not?

CAROLINE: I shall put him in a story!

RUSSELL: Oh?

CAROLINE: But I will make him a woman!

JANE: She laughed, rather nastily. (She does.) It had never occurred to Russell Daniel before to put actual people he knew into his writing. Would that not be unkind?

RUSSELL: Might you not hurt his feelings?

CAROLINE: He has feelings?!

JANE: Said she.

CAROLINE: Oh, I'm sorry. I did not mean that.

JANE: She obviously had meant it, but Russell Daniel did not say anything.

RUSSELL: Did you not enjoy the lunch?

CAROLINE: I suppose he would be deeply hurt if he saw himself as others see him.

JANE: She went on, playing with the doorknob.

CAROLINE: Of course he would never see it. But how exciting to hold the mirror up to Nature!

RUSSELL: I was just marking some student essays.

CAROLINE: Oh, you must race through them as fast as you can or you will go utterly mad.

RUSSELL: Truly?

CAROLINE: Put 'Well done!' on every other one, and everyone will be happy around here, administrators and students alike.

RUSSELL: But –

CAROLINE: I am quite serious. Do not waste your time. Do not actually read them.

RUSSELL: I thought my job, our job was to . . .

JANE: She looked at him with what seemed almost amazement. He noticed also that she seemed to be lingering.

RUSSELL: Would you like to come in?

JANE: He said, standing and offering her the student's chair that was used for tutoring.

CAROLINE: I cannot stay.

JANE: Good, he thought.

CAROLINE: I just wanted to say that I thought you were most amusing today, with Blossom.

RUSSELL: I was?

CAROLINE: The way you goaded him about the pudding and the Latin and everything. He did not even notice, but I did.

RUSSELL: I goaded him?

CAROLINE: I saw you smirk at how tedious he is.

JANE: She quickly looked behind her to see if anyone else might be eavesdropping, then came in a few steps.

RUSSELL: I smirked?

JANE: Russell Daniel answered, mystified. He had not been aware that he had smirked.

CAROLINE: I would like to discuss comedy and humour with you, not now, but sometime, Mr. Braun. I find it difficult to explain why some things in Shakespeare are considered amusing. They strike me as obtuse – all that fiddling with words and utterly banal, brainless fools spewing malapropisms. Is the theatre really that lacking in the subtle?

RUSSELL: I suppose it is unsubtle, but then –

CAROLINE: You are writing a play, are you not?

RUSSELL: Yes, I am. How did you know?

CAROLINE: You mentioned it at Registration, in passing. About people in the ante-chamber to Hell, is it not?

RUSSELL: I –

CAROLINE: I don't miss much. I flatter myself that I have a photographic memory and above-normal hearing.

RUSSELL: I am impressed.

JANE: He was indeed impressed, but he did not know if he should be flattered or not. Caroline Joyce seemed to hold both the theatre and comedy in very low esteem, wanting to absorb them like some backward foreign language that had so far eluded her, not to be enjoyed but merely to be mastered.

CAROLINE: I thought your reactions to the boiled pudding in particular were a great cause for satisfaction.

RUSSELL: Did you indeed? . . . And what were those reactions exactly?

CAROLINE: The way you stared so longingly at it, and yet you would not have it.

RUSSELL: I do not believe I stared at it that much.

CAROLINE: I saw your tongue stick out at one point.

RUSSELL: My tongue stuck out?

JANE: He put his fingertip on his tongue.

CAROLINE: Oh, now you are being most improper!

JANE: She suddenly exclaimed, flushing.

CAROLINE: How dare touch your tongue in front of me, Mr. Braun!

JANE: She backed away from his desk, her shoulders hunched, and ran from the office.

RUSSELL: Upon my word!

JANE: Russell Daniel thought.

RUSSELL: What a very, very strange woman.

JANE: . . . To Be Continued! Can you feel the romantic connection building between these characters? I want the audience to feel it – yet not for it to be overly obvious. Is it clear both are constrained by the conventions of proper decorum between unmarried men and women in their day? I hope the fact that they are Catholics won't be off-putting. It's time that the World realise that Catholics have feelings too! Shall I add a sub-plot? Of course Caroline's fiancé, Raymond, will provide some spice and suspense as well, I do believe.

LIGHTS OUT on JANE

CAROLINE : Miss Austen! A word!

LIGHTS UP on JANE

JANE: Yes?

CAROLINE: I think it's a good thing that you are risking having your heroine – she *is* that, right? – sprightly and unconventional. You have always done that very well in your novels. I just hope we won't lose sympathy for her. Is Russell Daniel going to fall in love with her? I suspect that is what you are laying the foundation for, but to be honest I did not yet feel any actual romantic attachment in him for Caroline Joyce, just curiosity.

JANE: No?

CAROLINE: You know your business more than I do, I am sure. No doubt his attraction to her is there and will gradually unfold itself. And the use of the double entendre of the “pudding” is risqué but very modern.

JANE: I have no idea what you mean by double entendre with “pudding.” I would suggest that you attend to what I write, not what you may wish to read! May we continue with my play? May I hope you are amused? . . . Continue, please!

JANE: One afternoon Raymond Raymond, the fiancé of Caroline Joyce, stopped by her college to have lunch with her. He was already inebriated at noon.

CAROLINE: Would you care to join us?

JANE: Caroline Joyce asked Russell Daniel as, quite by accident, they had all three run into each other in the hallway outside the faculty offices. She seemed not to recall that she had last hurried from his office while characterising his innocent remark as “very nasty.” Today she was all smiles.

RUSSELL: I would not wish to intrude.

RAYMOND: He does not wish to intrude. (Played by UTIL.ACTOR #1)

JANE: Said Raymond.

CAROLINE: Oh, come with us. It will be delightful.

JANE: Truth be told, she wondered how the two men would stack up against each other. She “loved” Raymond, as much as she felt required to marry him, but there was something about Russell Daniel that captivated her, something that she could not quite decipher in her own mind, despite her considerable powers of observation.

CAROLINE: Raymond and I just took tests to determine our intelligence. We will tell you the answers, if you want to take the test as well.

JANE: Against his better judgment, Russell Daniel went with them. This time, however, they went to a small baker's shoppe across from the college. It was usually cramped and the service slow, but the food was better less soggy than at the school.

CAROLINE: How does it feel to be our chaperon?

JANE: Caroline Joyce smiled. She seemed to be teasing Russell Daniel and even touched his forearm with her elbow. (She does.)

RUSSELL: I would never dream of being your chaperon.

RAYMOND: I will have a drink with liquor!

JANE: Raymond called out to the staff.

CAROLINE: Oh, sweeting, not so early in the day!

RAYMOND: It is never too early.

JANE: He replied, his eyes moist and filled with un-merriment. There was a space between his front teeth and some stains on them, from tobacco or snuff.

CAROLINE: Is he not precious, in his own way?

JANE: Said Caroline Joyce to Russell Daniel.

RUSSELL: I shall expect an invitation to the wedding.

RAYMOND: Where is my bloody drink?! Any kind, any time! Now!

CAROLINE: Sweeting, please!

JANE: Finally a drink with rum was delivered by the server, an old woman with a powdered wig, and not powdered well – some of the horse hairs in it showed in their natural colors underneath. (Played by Utility Actress #1) After that, Raymond seemed to settle down and seemed contented to gulp from his pewter goblet.

RUSSELL: Tell me about this test of intelligence which you took. Here at the college, was it?

CAROLINE: No, we sent away for the test. We had to seal them in certified envelopes and use a supervising notary. It was all rather complicated, still well worth the effort.

JANE: Russell Daniel was unsure whether to ask for details, though he was reasonably certain she would not have broached the subject had the results not been encouraging.

CAROLINE: It is all very new. They actually are now able to determine one's likely proficiencies.

RAYMOND: (sullenly) Or lack thereof.

JANE: Added Raymond, taking another gulp.

CAROLINE: Oh, sweeting, do not gulp your drink. It is not becoming.

RAYMOND: A gentleman needs a drink now and then.

CAROLINE: Is he not something!?

JANE: Caroline Joyce said with a mild vexation that seemed but partially to masque a real vexation underneath.

RUSSELL: Indeed he is.

JANE: In his mind he wondered how Raymond conducted his classes at the nearby college if he was already drunk at such an early hour. Perhaps he had very early classes and did not partake until afterwards.

RAYMOND: (Burps.)

JANE: Suddenly, Raymond was weeping.

RAYMOND: Such a bleeding failure. My test result did not equal Caroline Joyce's here.

JANE: He glared at her at first, then smiled, then wept some more.

CAROLINE: Oh, sweeting, it matters not. But your foul language does!

JANE: Naturally, Russell Daniel felt troubled and looked for a way to excuse himself. Why was he always finding himself in these far from enjoyable, discomfiting situations with Caroline Joyce? It even crossed his mind, fleetingly:

RUSSELL: Is she looking at me as a replacement for Raymond? Oh, but no, I do not think so. For that is never going to happen!

JANE: It can now be told that Russell Daniel was – excuse me, please – (spelling it out, including the asterisks) a vir\*\*n. He had not so much as kissed another human being, except relatives on birthdays and appropriate holidays. He had always found even those bussings, not only far from enjoyable, but unsettling, more like duties. He did not recoil from other people, as he had learned that would be remarked upon; nevertheless, he certainly did not seek out these physical connections. He knew, while also not fully knowing, that he was not like most other people. For they actually seemed to *want* to place their faces upon other persons' faces, even the lips.

RUSSELL: What a strange activity!

JANE: He thought in his heart of hearts. Yes, he liked certain people, just not enough to want to kiss them.

RUSSELL: Ever! Any of them!

JANE: This young man found Caroline Joyce rather peculiar, but he himself had his own eccentricities, and more, it must be said, than a few.

RUSSELL: And what about that test concerning intelligence?

JANE: Russell Daniel pressed on, despite his discomfiture.

CAROLINE: It would be immodest to say.

JANE: Said Caroline Joyce, tilting her head and looking quite pleased with herself. . . . To Be Continued! Thank you all for now.

(Exit the Utility Actors.)

(Enter HANS-AXL.)

HANS-AXL: You should take a nap now.

JANE: I don't really need a nap right now. My mind is racing. And we have guests!

HANS-AXL: I want a drink at the pub. I can't leave here unless you're asleep – and safe.

JANE: I'll be fine.

HANS-AXL: (loudly) Take a nap!

JANE: (quaking) All right. (She heads toward an exit.)

HANS-AXL: (dismissively) Uh, that voman!

LIGHTS OUT

LIGHTS UP

JANE: Here is some more of the play. A nap indeed!

(Enter Utility Actress #2 and Utility Actress #1 to play the parts, both in mime and then speaking.)

JANE: I hope you can keep it clear in your mind, despite receiving it in bits and pieces. (signals to actors) With more than an element of unease, Caroline Joyce shared her office at the college with a nun, a certain Sister Crucifixa, a woman of fifty who wore the traditional black and white habit of the contemplative and ascetic Benedictine Order, with a special dispensation to



CONT'D.

devote herself to teaching others. She was a large, crimson-faced person of a secretive disposition. Caroline Joyce feared unlocking the door of their shared office lest she discover Sister Crucifixa skulking about and then looking up guiltily as if she had been caught doing Something Sinful behind the closed door. Rarely did they speak except to exchange false pleasantries about the weather or each other's health, for their teaching schedules were happily at variance. However, one day not long after the luncheon that Caroline Joyce had shared with her fiancé and Russell Daniel, she discovered Sister Crucifixa at her own desk, at the far side of the room. Is that too much narration for a play? I confess I rather like it.

CAROLINE: Oh, I am so very sorry to disturb you.

JANE: Said Caroline Joyce.

NUN: No matter. (Played by Util. Actress #1)

JANE: Said the nun, hunching her large back and continuing to eat the gruel from the small bowl before her. She used a spoon in the form of death's head with the words "Memento Mori" clearly engraved on it. For such a large woman, it was remarkable how small the bowl of gruel was. She had once remarked in passing that, no matter how little she ate, she always seemed to hold her weight, surely close to two hundred pounds.

CAROLINE: I can return after you are finished.

NUN: Stay if you wish, Miss Smith.

JANE: Caroline Joyce entered the room and put her teaching notes on her desk. She could not help noticing once again that her office mate had managed to fill up the room with more than her share of items, leaving Caroline Joyce little more than her own desk for her things. Religious tracts, pamphlets, extra rosaries, holy cards of every single saint, statues of Christ, his mother, as well as breviaries and prayer books of every size and shape in bookcases lined the walls and were piled on the floor as high at a person's shoulders. Caroline Joyce had said nothing, as she was new and the nun had obviously been encamped there for decades. She tried to ignore the soft, slurping noises the nun was making.

(We hear them.)

But she could not. Sister Crucifixa seemed to be ashamed of having to satisfy the carnal need of eating at all, and her very attempts to be so very quiet accelerated attention to the fact that she was putting something into her mouth.

NUN: Excuse me, I thought I would be alone today.

JANE: She said by way of apology.

CAROLINE: It is no matter.

JANE: Nonetheless, she felt ill at ease and could not determine whether to stay or take her leave. She had appointments with some students in fifteen minutes, and hence decided to stay in the room.

NUN: Do you mind if I ask you something, Miss Smith?

JANE: Sister Crucifixa suddenly inquired. The words startled Caroline Joyce, because it was the first time the nun had initiated anything approaching a true conversation, and the younger woman, it must be remembered, suffered from excessive excitability and had even been known to scream once when she heard a kitten suddenly mew. She now tried to force her heart to stop pounding and her eyes to quit rolling in her head, though not entirely successfully, and thus she kept her own body turned way from the nun's, who continued to slurp her gruel in that pious, but irritating, manner.

CAROLINE: Ask me what, Sister?

JANE: She managed to get out.

NUN: I noticed your fiancé in your company the other day.

CAROLINE: Did you? I should have introduced you.

NUN: Do you entirely intend to marry him?

JANE: Caroline Joyce was struck by the arrogance of the nun's tone and the complete impropriety of the question, but it was a nun asking it and so she felt that she had to reply.

JANE: Raymond is a delightful man. High strung but a gentleman. His parents propose to give him five thousand a year when he marries. May I ask why you inquired?

NUN: It is not, of course, my place to interfere. I have had many office mates over the years, as you can well imagine. You are the first one I have ever asked such a thing.

CAROLINE: I suppose it is an honour for me then, is it not?

NUN: I do not do it to honour you. You strike me as a woman of special gifts, just as I was at your age. I merely mean to question you about the choice in life which you, I presume, are about to make.

CAROLINE: Ah, I believe I know what you endeavoring to say to me.

JANE: Caroline Joyce said, turning slightly, her eyes barely rolling in her head at last.

CAROLINE: You want to tell me that you wish that you yourself had met such a fine gentleman as Raymond and had married instead of becoming a nun.

JANE: Sister Crucifixa stopped slurping her gruel and looked into the other woman's eyes.

NUN: That is not it at all, Miss Smith. I do not think that you should, in fact, marry this Raymond.

CAROLINE: What can you mean?

NUN: I cannot explain it, but something in my soul requires me to speak openly what I am now saying to you. It would bother my conscience if I kept silent. Raymond is obviously not suitable as a partner. I could smell the drink on him from across the corridor when I saw you two. You also seemed to be interested in that Russell Daniel. Do not deny it! True, he is handsome with a guileless amiability, even to these fading old nun eyes, but you should not seek to marry him either. Again, something in my deepest soul tells me that you and he would be an infelicitous match.

CAROLINE: It must indeed be a deep soul you have to produce so many advisory admonitions, Sister! Pray tell, who should I marry then? Perhaps your soul knows that as well.

JANE: Said Caroline Joyce with a toss of her head.

NUN: You strike me as a woman who should never marry at all. You should become a nun.

CAROLINE: Like you!?

JANE: Caroline Joyce almost laughed.

CAROLINE: Hunched and slurping over my bowl of gruel!

NUN: Out of charity I will ignore your incivility, for I believe I must help you. I do not think you know what these men have planned for you once they have you in the marriage bed.

CAROLINE: What can you possibly mean?

JANE: She was starting to feel her eyes rolling wildly in her head again. She averted her gaze and grasped her bosom.

CAROLINE: I am sure that I don't want to know! So there!

NUN: Forewarned is forearmed. You will not want it, trust me. And marriage is forever!

CAROLINE: You are frightening me, Sister! Whatever can you possibly be insinuating? Raymond has never been anything but a complete gentleman. I cannot imagine that he would not continue to be the same after our marriage.

NUN: You remind me so much of myself at your age, my dear. Brilliant in some ways but incredibly naive. Indeed, I think you are no doubt even more innocent than I was. But I made the correct choice, a life of total celibacy. I have never regretted it. I think you will live in unbearable anguish if you should succumb to your romantic yearnings and make a marital alliance. How shall I say this? Your borderline hysteria and ethereal demeanor do not bode well for the hard knocks of married life.

CAROLINE: What hard knocks? Raymond shall have five thousand a year, more than we can ever need in order to live extremely well. As for Russell Daniel, I assure you that I would never marry him until I saw his stock portfolio and all other investments. So thank you very much!

JANE: By this time, Caroline Joyce's face had grown quite hot with temper.

NUN: There are hard knocks of other sorts, my dear. Besides ill fortune in monetary matters and the pitfalls of any course through this Vale of Tears, there will also be a demand for 'favors' from you, 'favors' you surely do not know the slightest thing about.

CAROLINE: Oh, for Heaven's sake, what favors can you be speaking of? Do you think I, as a modern woman of the early nineteenth century, do not know what favors I shall be expected to render to a husband?

NUN: Do tell me, and I will cease my warnings and even apologise to you for my imprudent intrusion into your private affairs.

JANE: Caroline Joyce hesitated, disturbed and in a fit of intense pique. She was not so sure that she wanted to say another word to this insufferable nun. Eventually, however, she said:

CAROLINE: I suppose my husband will expect me to kiss him on the lips, from time to time.

NUN: No doubt he will. . . . And?

CAROLINE: And fondle him.

NUN: Where?

CAROLINE: Where?

NUN: Yes.

CAROLINE: About the waist, I should imagine, and even tickle his ribs upon occasion! Or did you mean out in the garden?

JANE: Caroline Joyce flushed. Perhaps she was revealing too much about what she knew of the world's unseemly ways!

NUN: And?

CAROLINE: What is this implacable 'and' of yours, Sister?! I suppose that I will be expected to let him fondle me *back* if he wishes.

JANE: She would show this nun that she could be as bold in her responses as were these questions!

NUN: And what will that entail, this 'fondling'?

JANE: What was this nun hinting at? She looked so imperious and knowing, but there was, unbeknownst to her, a little bit of gruel at the edge of her mouth. *Ha!* thought Caroline Joyce. Warn me, will she!

CAROLINE: When she cannot even control her own gruel!

NUN: I will say no more. I can see I am distressing you.

CAROLINE: Hardly! You appear to think me some silly schoolgirl, yet I am more than you may think I am.

NUN: Excuse me. Perchance I misunderstood you. I merely wanted, as an act of Christian charity, to save you from unfortunate marital surprises.

CAROLINE: I have not only superior powers of observation, I also have the gift of imagination to assist me!

JANE: Caroline Joyce spat, thoroughly agitated now.

NUN: Well, good. I am pleased for you.

JANE: Sister Crucifixa turned back to her bowl of unfinished gruel. Oh, but now Caroline Joyce would not let it go.

CAROLINE: I do not suppose you have ever been in a marital bed yourself, have you, Sister, even once?

NUN: No, I have not. But I have read —

CAROLINE: I thought as much. Odd that you should think to offer me advice on the subject then, if you will permit me to say so.

NUN: I am indeed sorry that I brought it up.

CAROLINE: You thought that I did not know that the husband brings something on the wedding night that can amaze and horrify the unsuspecting bride, did you not? Well, I am here to tell you that I know all about it, and I will not be surprised by my husband, whoever he may turn out to be!

NUN: Then I am content.

JANE: Said the nun, putting down her spoon.

CAROLINE: I do not wish to live a life like yours. Celibacy, it seems to me, is vastly over-rated.

NUN: True, it is not for everyone.

JANE: Caroline Joyce rose from her desk, her heart racing yet again.

CAROLINE: When my husband tiptoes into our bedroom, trust me, I will not flinch or turn away from my marital duty! When he straddles me from a standing position and . . . voids his bladder onto my breasts, I will embrace it like every good wife does!

JANE: As she ran from the room, her eyes almost distended, she called out:

CAROLINE: Ha, ha, Sister, and you thought you could school me in married life, but you shant!  
You shant, you witch!

JANE: To Be Continued!

LIGHTS OUT on JANE

LIGHTS UP on ACTRESSES, a bit chagrined

LIGHTS UP on JANE

JANE: I am afraid that I am blushing as I ask this, but is it believable that a young woman would think urination rather than erection would constitute the ordinary marital act? I know it may stretch credulity, but I did myself *have* such a conversation with this young authoress. Her imagination was always greater than her experience, and led to excesses of all kinds in her febrile musings. I am not sure that I will portray the actual wedding night of my heroine, should she in fact wed. What do you think? It would be a departure for me an authoress.

UTIL. ACTRESS #1: I think just hearing about it should be fine.

UTIL. ACTRESS #2: Yeah, that should be plenty.

(They exit.)

JANE: Excuse me, I'm sure. (to audience) Shall we press on with the play? (to actors) Come along there!

(Enter Utility Actors to play the parts.)

JANE: It happened that a few days later Caroline Joyce, on news that her fiancé, Raymond, had to leave for several days to visit an elderly aunt in Y\_\_\_\_\_, who was near death (and might look favorably upon a nephew who showed up at her deathbed), invited Russell Daniel to join her in a game of tennis.

RUSSELL: I should be pleased to play with you.

JANE: Said Russell Daniel.

RUSSELL: I was going to hit a few balls by myself, it so happens. I have brought my tennis shoes and my racquet. Is that not a fortunate coincidence?

CAROLINE: Indeed it is.

JANE: Said Caroline Joyce. Although it might be thought, by some, that she had seen his tennis equipment upon his arrival at his office, which was neighbour to hers, and then seized upon the opportunity to engage in the sport with him that day.

RUSSELL: But shan't we require a chaperon?

JANE: Said he, ever respectful of Caroline Joyce's reputation.

CAROLINE: We are, I am sure, perfectly respectable.

JANE: Said she.

CAROLINE: Since I am an engaged woman, who will always keep faith with her fiancé, and, moreover, we shall be in plain sight of everyone on the school's tennis courts for the entire time.

JANE: She pursed her mouth at her somewhat risqué reply and asked him if she might borrow some of his equipment.

RUSSELL: What if we asked Sister Crucifixa if she has time to chaperon us?

CAROLINE: I am not speaking to her. She was quite rude to me the other day.

RUSSELL: My word! I am most heartily sorry to hear that.

CAROLINE: She is mad and should be locked up in an attic somewhere.

JANE: Oh, dear, thought Russell Daniel. This sounds like a quarrel that I had best not become involved in.

CAROLINE: I have a younger sister who is mad. Did you know that?

JANE: Caroline Joyce said, as they left the building.

CAROLINE: My parents have to watch over her night and day. She screams and runs around in frenzies on their garden lawn.

RUSSELL: I jolly well do have an extra racquet that you may use!

JANE: Said the young man, deflecting the intimate revelation.

RUSSELL: Is that not most fortunate?

CAROLINE: We are often the victims of Fortune.

JANE: She replied cryptically. The tennis courts were of grass, a bit worn, a bit dry, as it was October. The nets sagged in various areas and looked somewhat ragged in general, but they would serve.

RUSSELL: Are you quite good?

JANE: Asked Russell Daniel as they donned their playing shoes.

CAROLINE: Good? Am I quite good?

JANE: She seemed to mull the words over like something unsavoury on her tongue.

CAROLINE: Is any one of us really good?

JANE: He felt the same discomfiture that he had felt with her before, but he was a gentleman and pressed on. He felt that he did not get enough physical exercise and did not want to put on any weight. She took her place on the far side of the tennis court and waved her racquet back and forth threateningly.

CAROLINE: I shall whip you into a terrible submission!

RUSSELL: We shall see about that!

JANE: Replied Russell Daniel, taking his own place on the court. They were lucky that day, for there were no other players in sight, no one wanting to displace them on the one usable court.

CAROLINE: I find myself in need of vigorous exercise upon occasion!

JANE: She exclaimed.

CAROLINE: I formerly played tennis with my mad sister back home.

RUSSELL: How wonderful for you both!

CAROLINE: She always beat me!

JANE: Caroline Joyce spat.

CAROLINE: One does not relish losing at tennis to a mad sister. It was all I could do to keep myself from pushing her off the cliff near our house.

JANE: She looked down at the court, almost lost in a reverie, a musing that was unsettling to Russell Daniel.

RUSSELL: I have a half-brother I do not like!



JANE: He called out, hoping to share a confidence with her. When they began to hit the tennis ball back and forth, he could tell that Caroline Joyce was far from being a virtuoso in the sport. Indeed, she was barely coordinated, although she did succeed, usually, in hitting the ball over the net and not into the net.

RUSSELL: Well done!

JANE: He found himself exclaiming for the most pitiful of returns on her part. Oh, dear, he thought, we had best not play any actual games!

CAROLINE: Pray, are you ready now, Mr. Braun? I want to beat you. But do not just let me win!

RUSSELL: Never fear! I shan't let you win!

JANE: He had played with various young women previously. They were unable to compete with his skill, but they wanted to win so badly that he always had let them. He finally had decided not to indulge such partners any longer, especially after one of them had remarked, "Oh, Russell Daniel, your tennis game is not all that excellent, is it?" If Caroline Joyce was going to "whip him into submission," then by God, she was going to have to earn it.

CAROLINE: Let us play. We are just hitting back and forth like children!

RUSSELL: Should we not warm up? You do not want to get overheated too suddenly and faint.

CAROLINE: I am afraid, Mr. Braun, that you think we girls are more delicate than we actually are!

JANE: Returned she.

CAROLINE: I want to serve first!

JANE: She picked up a tennis ball and sailed it far over the line, in fact far over his head.

CAROLINE: How do you score that?

RUSSELL: That is love-fifteen.

JANE: She hit the ball again, and this time it bounced on the service line and skidded past him.

CAROLINE: That was good, correct?

JANE: Said she, jumping up and down a bit.

RUSSELL: Yes, that makes it fifteen-fifteen.

CAROLINE: Why is it not one to one, rather than fifteen to fifteen? What a silly way to score!

JANE: She hit the ball again. This one missed the service line by three inches.

CAROLINE: That was in!

JANE: Cried she.

RUSSELL: I am afraid it was out.

JANE: Russell Daniel countered.

CAROLINE: It was in. In! In!

JANE: She jumped and down in a fury, pouting.

RUSSELL: All right, if you think so, Miss Smith.

CAROLINE: Do not just give it to me! I am not a child! That serve was most decidedly in, and I now lead by what?

RUSSELL: You lead thirty to fifteen.

JANE: He sighed.

CAROLINE: See, it was good for fifteen more points! You had better watch out! I am a killer!

RUSSELL: Do your worst!”

JANE: Said he. And so it went, back and forth, with Caroline Joyce calling her obvious faults as good and refusing to accept many of his clear winners as legitimate. She “won” the first set six games to four.

CAROLINE: Oh, that was exhilarating!

JANE: She breathed as they stepped to the side of the court. Russell Daniel had thought to bring along tonic water.

RUSSELL: Would you care for some? I am afraid that I brought only one cup to drink from, as I did not know that –

CAROLINE: You want me to drink from the same cup as you?!

JANE: Cried she, one eye rolling in her head.

CAROLINE: The very same cup?

JANE: Her hands went to her bosom in a defensive posture.

CAROLINE: Oh, I could not. I could not! What would Raymond say? Mr. Braun, what would everyone think?

JANE: She looked around them nervously, although there were only a few late-in-the day stragglers about.

RUSSELL: I could let you drink from the flask first. Then I can finish what you do not finish.  
Is that a solution perhaps?

CAROLINE: You then do not mind putting your lips where *mine* just were?

JANE: He did not answer, for there was something in the way her body had tightened, her eye become jittery that unnerved him. What should he reply? He had, or so he thought, no ulterior motive in drinking from the very flask that she was now lifting to her parched mouth while revealing her arched neck to his naked eye, that one aberrant, manic, rolling eye of hers trained on his face.

LIGHTS OUT on ALL  
LIGHTS UP on JANE

JANE: To Be Continued! (to audience) Well, what do you think? Is it clear that Caroline Joyce is quite a spit-fire with more than enough pluck for two girls? Isn't she alluring? And as for Russell Daniel, is it coming through that, despite his seeming lack of passion, he is falling deeply in love with her? Are there any topics that you wish to bring up? I do have the scoring for tennis exact, do I not? To be honest, I have never played the game, only observed it once at W\_\_\_\_\_. As for Caroline Joyce's eccentric eye rolling, it is something no doubt that will be taken care of once she experiences the love of a good man.

UTIL. ACTRESS #2": Isn't that rather old-fashioned?

JANE: My heroines always are wrong initially and then improve because of the love and guidance of a good man.

UTIL. ACTRESS #1: Isn't the the real truth that men are always wrong and that women need to straighten out and "correct" them?

UTIL. ACTRESS #2: Can't you make the women strong and powerful and self-determining, without mistakes about whom to love, the way they really are.

JANE: I do not know what world you are living in. I can hardly believe it exists. Has the world truly changed so wondrously? Or is it not, as I suspect, much ado about wish-fulfillment here?  
(taking out a handkerchief) I am afraid all this tension has given me a nose-bleed.

(HANS-AXL rushes in and attends to Jane's nose-bleed.)

LIGHTS OUT  
LIGHTS UP on HANS-AXL

HANS-AXL: She'll live. I told her not to put the stress on herself *mit* a play. But she won't listen to me.

LIGHTS OUT on HANS-AXL  
LIGHTS UP on JANE

JANE: I am happy to report that my nose-bleed was not fatal! Shall we let the play continue?

(Enter Utility Actors to play the parts.)

CAROLINE: Guess what has happened!

JANE: Said Caroline Joyce to Russell Daniel as they were enjoying a picnic in a lovely green park not far from their college. They had spread out a large blanket and covered it with various breads (wheat and soda), nuts, fruits, a portion of sliced ham, and some nectar that he had pressed from grapes – but not allowed to ferment, of course, as both he and Caroline Joyce were believers in abstinence from liquor and never drank it except when they received the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ in the wine at Holy Communion.

RUSSELL: I can scarcely imagine what.

JANE: Replied Russell Daniel.

RUSSELL: To judge from your smile, it must be indeed wondrous.

JANE: In truth, she was beaming, her countenance almost making up in delighted animation and excitement at her news what it lacked in actual attractiveness.

UTIL. ACTRESS #2: She can't be that ugly!

JANE: It's the part, not the actress.

CAROLINE: (after settling down) I have had a book accepted by a publisher in London!

RUSSELL: My word! I did not know that you had written a book.

CAROLINE: I did not tell anyone, except Raymond, who of course did not remember it, as he is inebriated so much of the time. I did not want others to judge me harshly should I not succeed in finding a proper publisher. But now that I have, I can tell everyone, especially you, as my very best friend, that I have gathered together a collection of my briefer tales and they shall be out in a very short time.

JANE: She fetched a cashew nut from the blanket and popped it between her teeth and sat back.

RUSSELL: I could hardly be happier for you.

JANE: Said Russell Daniel, entirely sincere. He did not mention to her that he was at work on a book, a novel, about some dark events close to his own heart. The subject matter involved was disturbing, he knew, to many, and he refrained from mentioning it in polite society.

RUSSELL: What are your tales concerned with?

JANE: Asked he.

CAROLINE: I suppose I shall have to let you read it, if you insist. I do not know what you will think of me then, however. You may be shocked to learn of the things I have imagined in that book.

JANE: She turned her head coyly. She knew that her chin was her best feature and showed well even in bright daylight.

CAROLINE: You have been warned!

RUSSELL: I should love to read it, and I would never judge you for what you put into your book. After all, you did not in fact *do* the things you write about, did you?

CAROLINE: It is only the unimaginative who must resort to actually *doing* the things that the world may consider unseemly. I am a very conventional woman, as I hope you have noticed.

JANE: Russell Daniel had a bemused look upon his own handsome face. *His* book, he felt sure, was probably as socially upsetting as anything in Caroline Joyce's book, yet he could not say with any truth that he had merely imagined some of the events in his.

RUSSELL: Perhaps I can help you sell your forthcoming book in some way.

CAROLINE: Would you do that for me? How kind you are, Mr. Braun.

RUSSELL: I could possibly review it for the college's newsletter or we could arrange a round-table discussion of it with faculty and students.

JANE: She looked happy.

CAROLINE: Oh, yes, but you must read it first. I would not wish you to recommend a book which you have not read.

RUSSELL: I will read it. But I would certainly help to promote a book by a friend even if I had not read it, out of friendship. I would not have to say I enjoyed it *myself*, just that perhaps others might.

CAROLINE: Ah, you are scrupulous. I like that quality in you very much.

RUSSELL: I find that the fewer friends one has, the more one treasures each.

CAROLINE: You are so much more charming to be around than my fiancé. Would you care to go to a musical performance that the school is having this Saturday? I asked Raymond, naturally, to go with me, but he abhors crowds and says that he would rather stay home and read. He will read, yes, but with a bottle or two of Bootles gin by his side.

RUSSELL: Are you certain that Raymond will not object if we two yet again go somewhere without him?

JANE: She tossed her head as she popped another cashew into her mouth.

CAROLINE: Oh, Raymond will probably shoot you one day. It goes without saying.

JANE: She laughed, gaily.

CAROLINE: (laughing) Is it too great a price to pay for my company?

JANE: Russell Daniel laughed too, but with something of a lump in his throat.

RUSSELL: Why would he shoot me? You and I are simply friends. Raymond I consider a friend as well.

CAROLINE: Ah, you are a good man. And I am a good woman.

JANE: Said she, placing both arms behind her on the blanket and lifting her bosom ever so slightly.

CAROLINE: Oh, the sun is too bright on my face!

JANE: She complained, twisting from side to side.

RUSSELL: I should have thought of an umbrella. I meant to. I am sorry for my forgetfulness.

JANE: Caroline Joyce thrust her bosom further out.

CAROLINE: Oh, it is so very hot today!

JANE: She looked very uncomfortable indeed.

CAROLINE: And these nuts shall make hives!

RUSSELL: Would you like us to leave? I can gather all these things. We can do it again on some less warm day.

JANE: He began to pick up the items from the blanket. She looked hard into his eyes just as he glanced up.

CAROLINE: Yes, my Raymond will shoot you with a dueling pistol out of jealousy. He is quite jealous, you know, underneath all that drink. He is a very passionate man; the drink hides it. You probably know that. I like it that you take risks on my behalf and yet are so very . . . polite.

JANE: Russell Daniel, a trickle running inside his collar, had begun to sweat. The sun was only partially responsible.

RUSSELL: There is no need for jealousy on Raymond's part. Have you not made that clear to him?

CAROLINE: No.

JANE: He ran a finger inside his collar, but he still felt stifled.

RUSSELL: It takes two to make a duel.

CAROLINE: He will come to your office and shoot you dead and he will come after me next. Oh, I pray it doesn't happen!

RUSSELL: That might ruin our friendship.

JANE: Said Russell Daniel dryly.

JANE: Here is a lithograph of me I had made. I did it with the hope that one day I should be able to use it on the flap of a book I had written. Is it not well done?

JANE: He looked at the lithograph. If he had not known that it was supposed to be Caroline Joyce Smith, he would not have guessed it. The woman in the lithograph was glamorous, her hair piled on top of her head, her lips full and parted.

CAROLINE: Why do you not comment? Do I not look beautiful in it?

JANE: He hesitated, then said:

RUSSELL: It does not much resemble you.

JANE: Her face changed drastically, the mouth seemed ill-fitting, the eyes now caustic and furious.

CAROLINE: What do you mean that it does not resemble me? You think I am ugly then!

JANE: She took the lithograph from his hand and shoved it back into her reticule.

CAROLINE: No, I am beautiful! And you are a cruel brute! I never want to see you again. I will marry Raymond and you will die alone! You watch! He will make me happy! You will have no one! How dare you say that it does not look like me!

JANE: Russell Daniel was dismayed, standing there with the blanket in his hands, some of the picnic items falling out, the loaf of bread, some Brazil nuts. He opened his mouth to apologise, but she would not listen and ran from the park, her reticule clasped against her bosom, leaving him dumbfounded and amazed. (She does.) . . . There's more! The next day Caroline Joyce asked to speak to Russell Daniel alone. Having shown up outside his class in Freshman Rhetoric, she beckoned for him to follow her to a place where they could speak in private. They now thus stood at the bottom of a stairwell as it spiraled above them, in the bowels of the college. He did not wish to accompany her, but he saw no gentlemanly way out of this forced meeting.

CAROLINE: We can speak in secret here. I would have asked you to my office, but Sister Crucifixa is there again, meditating. She is the holiest person on the face of the Earth!

JANE: Caroline Joyce looked cross, her hair up and wearing lip rouge. She almost looked like the woman in the lithograph that she had shown him at the picnic.

RUSSELL: I do have another class coming up. I should like to look over my notes before –

CAROLINE: Oh, forget your class! They are such idiots they will not know if you have prepared for days or simply are inventing it as you go along. That is what I do, and they are spellbound. Of course it is easy when one is brilliant.

JANE: Russell Daniel felt hemmed in by the nearby wall and the stairwell. He was feeling under the weather as well. It could have been a spider bite from the picnic.

CAROLINE: I must apologise to you.

JANE: Said Caroline Joyce, rubbing the fingers of one pale hand over the back of the other.

CAROLINE: I felt hurt that you did not care for my lithograph.

RUSSELL: Well, I . . .

CAROLINE: Hush! The lithograph does not matter.

JANE: She put her finger toward his lips to shush him, then diverted it to his wrist.

CAROLINE: Are you going to flinch, Mr. Braun? Am I being too forward?

JANE: Two under-classmen were coming down the spiral staircase. She withdrew her finger from his wrist and moved a step backward. Russell Daniel nodded at the two students even though he did not know them personally. They appeared to whisper to one another as they they disappeared down the basement's corridor.

CAROLINE: Why must women always be the ones to wait? It can lead to a lifetime of waiting!

JANE: Her eyes flashed.

CAROLINE: Unless, of course, the truth is that you do not like me, not even a little, that you find me not attractive? Do I not resemble the lithograph today even a trifle?

JANE: She put her eyes down. He felt compelled to say something comforting.

RUSSELL: I do like you, and not just a trifle.

JANE: It was more than he meant to say, but the words were out of his mouth. He quickly said:



RUSSELL: And how is Raymond faring?

CAROLINE: Oh, him! He wants me to marry him in three months. Raymond can be very loving and thoughtful, yet he will do the most silly things as well, such as driving his gig off onto the wrong roadways. We drive sometimes for miles because he is blithely lost and does not even seem to know it. Nor am I allowed to call this to his attention! Nor can I drive his gig! He drives me mad! Then there are his teeth. So stained! He says that he will quit drink once he marries me, but what does he take me for? I have never known a person, man or woman, to improve after marriage!

RUSSELL: Perhaps you should not marry Raymond then.

CAROLINE: But a respectable woman must be married! And I want very much to be married. I shall be twenty-five in a few months' time!

JANE: She looked distraught.

RUSSELL: Yes, but do not marry merely to be married, surely.

CAROLINE: You should be married too, Mr. Braun. I am certain it would improve you!

JANE: She looked flummoxed.

CAROLINE: Not that you need that much improvement.

JANE: Her hand came up to her bosom as she tried to calm herself.

CAROLINE: Excuse me, my heart is racing. It often races. There seems to be nothing that I can do about it. It makes me act and say things that I . . .

RUSSELL: Perhaps a sedative?

CAROLINE: Oh, I would never pollute my body with potions of any sort!

RUSSELL: Not even Valerian?

CAROLINE: Not even that. Any anxiety I suffer I offer up for the poor souls in Purgatory. It is indeed a comfort that the pain need not go to waste. Do you, Mr. Braun, ever offer up anything for the poor souls in Purgatory?

RUSSELL: I once did, toothache. I do not find the occasion now to do so as much as I once did.

JANE: The truth was that Russell Daniel had begun to question some of the very basic doctrines of the Faith that he had been born into. Naturally he could say nothing to anyone.

CAROLINE: You should marry Sister Crucifixa!

JANE: Caroline Joyce suddenly cried.

CAROLINE: It would save you both!

JANE: She looked proud of herself for her irreverent suggestion.

RUSSELL: She would not be my *first* choice. And what if she were to reject my proposal?!  
I should be quite crestfallen.

JANE: Russell Daniel laughed at his joke.

CAROLINE: I have heard of nuns who have leapt over the wall of their convents and escaped  
with their forbidden lovers.

RUSSELL: It is an idea that I will think upon.

CAROLINE: Or my mad sister! You could marry her! She would bring you to full maturity in no time.

JANE: She laughed too, almost to herself.

CAROLINE: You two will have fourteen half-mad children!

JANE: The idea seemed to fill Caroline Joyce with utter delight.

RUSSELL: Surely *thirteen* would be my lucky number.

CAROLINE: You will spend your days chasing them on the lawn of your tidy but modest home,  
all of them screaming and carrying on while you attempt to finish your lecture notes!

RUSSELL: You paint a picture that one can only hope to aspire to.

CAROLINE: Have you read my book of tales yet, Mr. Braun?

RUSSELL: Indeed I have not, Miss Smith. I intend to get to it very soon.

JANE: The fact was that Russell Daniel had indeed already read her book. While he could not say that  
he either wholeheartedly embraced her book or despised it, he had been struck by the amount of  
violence it.

CAROLINE: I want to know what you think about it. Is it too violent? A review has come out from  
some fool saying that it is too full of violence. Is *King Lear* too full of violence?

RUSSELL: You are no doubt correct. Often writers of the past are forgiven for the very sort of  
things that more contemporary authors are condemned for.

CAROLINE: How right you are, Mr. Braun! I like that thought.

JANE: Still, he thought, so many tales about gangs, rapists, fathers shooting their entire families with blunderbusses, and on and on. The novel I am writing does not begin to approach hers in such topics. My topic is far less horrific, but it will not please most people no doubt, nor ever a publisher. He wondered if he could ever possibly show it to Caroline Joyce. No! That would not happen.

CAROLINE: You are pensive. You must forgive me if I sometimes become overwrought. Please say that you will.

RUSSELL: You are the epitome of womanly good manners. You could not misbehave in any way, I am sure. Your deportment has always been impeccable.

JANE: He bit his tongue, like the gentleman he was.

CAROLINE: Do you truly think so?

JANE: Asked she, in a small voice.

CAROLINE: I do so want to keep your friendship.

RUSSELL: I enjoy your company. It is just that –

CAROLINE: You enjoy my company after all? I have not driven you away because of the way I behaved at our picnic?

RUSSELL: Of course not.

CAROLINE: Oh, I am so relieved! I feared that I had driven a divide between us.

RUSSELL: On the contrary, I have arranged for a panel discussion of your forthcoming book. We shall hold it here in the refectory. I have loaned my copy to two other faculty members. I shall be the third. It is not precisely *The Times* of London, but it is a start on what surely will be a great career.

JANE: He wanted to take her hands in his, but he did not, worried that the gesture would be interpreted as meaning more than it did.

CAROLINE: Oh, bless you, Mr. Braun. I have never before had a panel discussion about my work. It will be too thrilling. Can you possibly make sure the members of the panel admire the book before they appear? It would be dreadful to have them attack the book, especially if I had to sit there and listen to them!

RUSSELL: I am reasonably certain that no one who dislikes the book that much would wish to be on this panel.

JANE: He had indeed asked four others and been turned down, including by Professor Percival Blossom. But he was not about to tell her that.

CAROLINE: Oh, why do we have to go through these terrible humiliations just to get readers for our creations? I would gladly banish any and all panels if I could avoid them. The creation of the tales alone is what satisfies me. It is my Art that feeds my soul.

RUSSELL: I would imagine that your publisher has other considerations.

CAROLINE: I hope you never write, Mr. Braun. No one should have to go through what I am going through.

RUSSELL: Oh, maybe one day I will venture something. You lead the way, and I will learn from your adventure.

CAROLINE: I seem to recall that you have written something already. Have you not? Is it a play?

RUSSELL: I have written several plays, I confess. Alas, I do not think they are as yet suitable for the world to perform.

CAROLINE: I should like to read your plays, or one of them. Would you consent to that?

RUSSELL: They really are not good. I would hope in time to revise them.

CAROLINE: They are your juvenilia then?

JANE: Said she, with a provocative lilt to her voice.

RUSSELL: Perhaps.

JANE: The plays, he knew, unlike the novel he was writing, were suitable for anyone who cared to peruse them.

CAROLINE: Oh, you are so easy to talk to. Can I confide something to you?

RUSSELL: Confide?

CAROLINE: Do you know why I write about what I write about?

RUSSELL: Imagination, I believe, is very important in your aesthetic, is it not?

CAROLINE: Oh, that! 'Tis true. However, I really write because I enjoy envisioning the mayhem, the catastrophes, the depravity, the violence that befalls my characters.

JANE: Caroline Joyce all of a sudden looked vulnerable. It was the only time that he had ever seen her look actually vulnerable, instead of merely acting it.

CAROLINE: You won't tell anyone of my visions. Will you? I have these impulses, these wishes . . . men doing things to me, bad things.

RUSSELL: Bad things?

CAROLINE: Throwing mud onto my face, smearing their . . . their *odors* on my ribbons.

RUSSELL: Do you?

CAROLINE: I suppose I am ill in some way.

JANE: She brought her clenched hand to her cheek.

RUSSELL: Good Heavens, of course not!

JANE: He said with great conviction. His previous experience in acting in plays in grammar school had trained him well.

CAROLINE: Are you sure that you do not find me bizarre, tainted? I have used these horrible fantasies in my fictions. I have numerous such fantasies, almost daily, even hourly. I just had one a moment ago!

JANE: He searched his mind for a response.

RUSSELL: I would guess that most people have such fantasies.

CAROLINE: Even women?

RUSSELL: Why would they not? Men have fantasies. Women strike me as being very similar to men, no matter what we are told.

JANE: She reached out and grabbed his hand.

CAROLINE: Oh, thank you, thank you, Mr. Braun! You are so good! I would hate for you to condemn my fantasies or ever to think less of me in any way for what I have just revealed to you. I have never told another human being, not even Raymond. I would be too ashamed.

RUSSELL: You have nothing to be ashamed about whatsoever, Miss Smith. I am sure that your Art demands a cauldron of creativity, such as your brain, to spring to life.

CAROLINE: Yes, yes! And do you know what else is true of me?

JANE: He blanched, but held his kindest smile in place upon his face.

CAROLINE: When I envision these fantasies, this cascade of miseries I feel a strange kind of protection from the terrors of the real world.

RUSSELL: Do you?

JANE: She gripped his hand tighter. Her fingernails were cutting into his flesh.

CAROLINE: When I dwell in this inner world, I know that I have woven a cocoon of safety, for I have anticipated all that this monstrous universe can bring to bear upon a poor woman's head, and thus I have triumphed over each and every calamity that may pursue me to the end of time! They cannot get me because I got there first!

RUSSELL: You have absolutely no need to feel the slightest twinge of guilt about any of this.

JANE: The look of extreme gratitude and relief on Caroline Joyce's face made him feel happy. He patted her hand once more, and they separated, for a time. But could he really continue to have this odd, strangely painful woman in his life? he thought. . . . To Be Continued!

LIGHTS OUT on JANE and the UTILITY ACTORS  
LIGHTS UP on HANS-AXL

HANS-AXL: Is possible she hinting that Russell Daniel has a 'secret' like that of some of those people you had hear about now? Like our gardener and the houseboy? Miss Austen has become very interested in such people since she came out of freezer. I don't get it. To be honest, don't think most of her readers will welcome such a twist -- and that Caroline Joyce in the play will welcome it even less! You vatch!

LIGHTS OUT on HANS-AXL  
LIGHTS UP on JANE

JANE: I hope the characters are not too 'zany' for you. I still hold out hope that some theatre will fancy it. Do you know any who might be interested? I have noticed when I look at the Internet that my poor name comes up rather often. Perhaps the Old Gal is not quite finished yet! While I am trying to maintain my traditional writing style, I think it unavoidable that elements of my style, and even content, should *evolve*, just as I, its authoress, am evolving. Oh, by the way, Hans-Axl and I are engaged to be *married*! Is this not joyful news indeed? More later! The play continues!

(Enter the Utility Actors to play the parts.)

JANE: Some months passed, and Caroline Joyce and Russell Daniel continued to spend much time together. On this day we find them in an open carriage in the country, she with a new silk bonnet and he with a riding jacket he had borrowed from a fellow instructor who rode. She had been loaned a landau and one horse by some anonymous admirer of her book, which had at last appeared. The gray horse was old and gentle and was easy for Russell Daniel to control even though he had not driven many carriages in his twenty-five years.

CAROLINE: Look at those beautiful homes!

JANE: Cried Caroline Joyce as they jogged along, alas the road only barely serviceable.

CAROLINE: All empty! How amiable it must be to be so rich that you can leave your mansion unoccupied. Someday I too will be that rich.

RUSSELL: Gee!

JANE: Cried Russell Daniel when the horse started to veer to the side.

CAROLINE: You did that so very well!

RUSSELL: I am afraid I am clumsy at this; however, I do know my “gee” from my “haw.”

CAROLINE: By the way, one of my pupils saw you and I walking on the campus the other day and said to me, ‘Oh, Miss Smith, I saw you with your husband. How lucky you are to have such an attractive man in your life.

JANE: Russell Daniel blushed. His temples grew rosy with self-consciousness.

RUSSELL: I hope you corrected your student.

JANE: Replied he.

RUSSELL: And how is your fiancé, may I ask?

CAROLINE: Ah, Raymond keeps pressing me to fulfill my promise and marry him, even though he rarely wished to accompany me to concerts, poetry readings, lectures, luncheons, walks, or drives in the countryside. He prefers to stay in his room and read and drink. He has missed several of his classes, and I fear that he may be terminated from his position at his college.

JANE: She turned and looked at Russell Daniel’s profile.

CAROLINE: Other than that, he is splendid!

RUSSELL: He is kind, though, is he not?

CAROLINE: I suppose. He has told me that he does not care if he is terminated from his position, as he had enough income from his family to provide more than he needs to live very well without the college.

RUSSELL: I do hope that you two succeed in reconciling your differences. I am sure you will. In the meantime, thank you for sharing this carriage with me.

CAROLINE: I am quite surprised by the reception my little book has been receiving. Of course, one must never become presumptuous and imagine for one moment that it will continue. There could be a robber behind that shrubbery over there right this moment waiting to scare the horse and cut our heads from our bodies.

JANE: He looked over at her. She was quite serious.

RUSSELL: Surely not on such a lovely day as this.

JANE: He gestured at the sunlight, the sprinkling of white clouds above them. For England, it was glorious, with not even a hint of showers.

CAROLINE: Of course I shall shoot them dead with my pistol. I now keep one here as well as the one in my reticule that I have in my office.

RUSSELL: You make me worry that I do not have one of my own.

CAROLINE: Raymond refuses to own a pistol too. I told him that he is foolish, for anyone would be able to shoot him in a second, and there would be nothing he could do about it, save expire on the spot.

JANE: Caroline Joyce set her jaw and grabbed hold of the top of the carriage door as they rumbled over a rut.

RUSSELL: I am glad the panel discussion of your book I arranged at school was such a success.

CAROLINE: Though sparsely attended.

JANE: She snapped

RUSSELL: Yes, it was probably held a bit too early. Before all the attention that has ensued. You must be very pleased.

CAROLINE: I have never sought attention. It just brings all sorts of ruffians out of the woodwork.

RUSSELL: Well, did it not result in the loan of this landau?

CAROLINE: I suppose it did. I also had a note dropped into my mail at school, with a disgusting message in it.

RUSSELL: Truly? Would you care to say what it said?

CAROLINE: It was anonymous. But I think it came from Percival Blossom, our chairman. He has access to all our mail.

RUSSELL: Percival Blossom?

CAROLINE: Of course Sister Crucifixa could have done it. I would not put anything past her!

RUSSELL: What was in this message? I am deeply curious now.

CAROLINE: Oh, I would never speak it out loud. For it is, indeed, literally ‘unspeakable.’

RUSSELL: Perhaps it should be reported to a constable then?



CAROLINE: It could have been sent *by* the constable. I have noticed how he watches me when I go from class to class.

RUSSELL: Truly? . . . Haw!

JANE: He cried, to make the horse veer back to the left a bit.

CAROLINE: Men are really quite filthy-minded, aren't they?!

RUSSELL: I suppose it depends on the man.

CAROLINE: Do you know much of men?

JANE: Said she with a hint of slyness.

RUSSELL: I know very little, actually. You are quite right to fault me on that.

CAROLINE: I wonder if there is more to you than appears on the surface, hmm? You cannot possibly be as 'good' as you seem.

RUSSELL: I am an open book!

JANE: Laughed he.

CAROLINE: And pray tell what book is that, the Holy Bible or a filthy fabliau by Chaucer?

RUSSELL: I am afraid I do not know any fabliaux by Chaucer, or anyone else for that matter.

CAROLINE: You know what? I believe you. I pride myself on being able to read the hearts of other people.

JANE: She looked behind the carriage to see if they were being followed.

CAROLINE: You are that rarest of men, Mr. Braun, a pure one.

RUSSELL: You make it seem as if that, in itself, is a sin.

CAROLINE: You are still a boy, I suspect. A lovely boy.

JANE: He frowned, unsettled by her evaluation of him. A thought entered his mind.

RUSSELL: Perhaps there *is* more to me than meets the eye.

JANE: He ventured. Caroline Joyce put her hand up.

CAROLINE: Oh, do not take my words to believe that I want to hear anything untoward that you may have done, or may be considering doing. Oh, no, no, no, no!

RUSSELL: Rest assured that I would never impose any unwanted information on you.

CAROLINE: Good! There are limits that even good friends should not cross.

RUSSELL: I imagine so.

CAROLINE: In your case, though, I would guess that the revelations would be on the order of, “I was once two minutes late for a lecture’ or “I once kissed a girl from a charity school!”

RUSSELL: I think you find me quite bland, rather a milk sop.

JANE: He snapped the harness of the landau, and the horse sped up.

CAROLINE: Ah, the gentleman has taken umbrage at my poor guess about his so-called secrets.

RUSSELL: I might amaze you – one of these days.

JANE: The horse was going very fast now, and both of them were jiggling on the carriage’s seat. Russell Daniel was managing to hold onto the reins, but there was no guarantee that the situation would continue as such.

CAROLINE: Now why do I doubt that?

JANE: She said, again in a teasing voice that had begun to grate on his nerves.

RUSSELL: Maybe I will have secrets! I am twenty-five, nearly twenty-six, years old. Perhaps it is time to find at least one!

CAROLINE: If you do, Mr. Braun, I beg you not to inform me of it. If I may I warn you – it is always preferable to imagine secrets than to soil oneself with coarse realities. Here I am being given landaus on loan and glowing mentions in the press and glamorous invitations for my flights of vigorous imagination. You do not have to risk more than that. Besides, no one of taste really wants to go into ‘certain areas.’

RUSSELL: Thank you. I will bear that in mind.

CAROLINE: Do not let my teasing or my success with my book push you into realms that you may not be able to retreat from.

RUSSELL: I am sure I do not know what you mean.

CAROLINE: Oh, come, Mr. Braun. I think you and I both know that you have not always been as chaste as you pretend. In fact, I would be willing to bet the ever-growing royalties from my book that you have engaged in . . . Oh, but do let us change the topic of our discussion!

RUSSELL: Engaged in what? Say it out, Miss Smith. What is it that you accuse me of, pray tell?

JANE: The horse was pulling the carriage now at a good fifteen miles per hour, and the road looked treacherous ahead, full of gullies and declivities. She placed her hand upon her bonnet, whose ribbons were flying in the wind. Her cheeks were pink with excitement at the ride as well as temper that he seemed to be challenging her.

CAROLINE: Well, if you must know, Mr. Braun, I suspect you of *Onanism!*

JANE: His mouth blew out a gust of air.

RUSSELL: What in the world is *Onanism?*

CAROLINE: I think you know very well what I mean!

RUSSELL: I do not know what you mean. Shall we leave it at that?

JANE: He snapped the reins more than was quite necessary.

CAROLINE: Do not, I pray you, frighten the horse.

RUSSELL: I would not dream of it!

JANE: Both did not speak for some time, the heart of each roiling, for it was their first quarrel. He spoke first.

RUSSELL: I am so pleased for you that since your collection of short tales had appeared in print, there has been so much acclaim.

CAROLINE: Thank you!

JANE: Said she, her lips pursed.

RUSSELL: I saw seemingly ‘scandalized’ – but actually approving – notices in *British Critic* and even *Critical Review*. You seem to have been able to titillate and yet not alienate the critics.

CAROLINE: True. I am likewise beginning to receive requests for appearances at conferences for aspiring authors, interviews in the local press, and a veiled but unmistakable invitation to drink tea with Lord K\_\_\_\_\_ in G\_\_\_\_\_.

RUSSELL: Have you indeed?

CAROLINE: They are pouring in daily.

RUSSELL: I would imagine that I would be afraid to meet you, with your new celebrity, had I not already known you before.

CAROLINE: I am the same person.

RUSSELL: Fame can take its toll, I hear.

CAROLINE: At least I know that you have not been my friend because of my fame.

RUSSELL: You may certainly count on that.

JANE: They were silent for a few more moments.

CAROLINE: Would you consider accompanying me to Lord K\_\_\_\_\_’s estate? He thinks a public reading at high tea of some scenes from my book might prove diverting to some of his friends. I do not pay it much mind myself. But I know that you seem to care for theatrical presentations and might enjoy the experience. What do you say? I understand that the house is second in size only to Chatsworth.

JANE: Russell Daniel was impressed and very much wished to see Lord K\_\_\_\_\_’s estate. He had heard that it had fifty rooms and even one very large one set aside for theatrical events. How marvelous to have one’s work presented there! He could not tell for certain if Caroline Joyce was making so little of the invitation because she truly did not value theatre, whatever its venue, or because she was guarding herself against disappointment, should the presentation of scenes not prove pleasing to the august assemblage.

RUSSELL: Should not your future husband accompany you to this event?

CAROLINE: I have stopped asking him to go. He says he will not go with me until I marry him. However, I am convinced that, were I to marry him, not only would he still not go to places I wish to go to, but would prevent me from going as well!

RUSSELL: Do you still intend to marry Raymond then?

CAROLINE: I cannot make up my mind. Some days I just think I should throw all caution to the wind and surrender to a domestic marriage with Raymond. But then who would I invite to Lord K\_\_\_\_\_’s stately home?

RUSSELL: I am sure I do not know. Apparently not your husband!

CAROLINE: Oh, why is everything so difficult!

JANE: She replied in a peevish voice.

CAROLINE: I’m cold!

JANE: She moved closer to Russell Daniel.

CAROLINE: Why do you not protect me from the cold?! Why are you so cold? You are colder than the cold itself!

JANE: She seemed to him to want him to put his arm around her shoulders.

RUSSELL: I must drive the carriage with two hands. We would not want to have a terrible accident, would we?

CAROLINE: Such control, you possess!

JANE: She pouted for a few moments, then spoke again.

CAROLINE: You should know that there was a representative from Thomas Egerton of Whitehall here to see me yesterday, the publisher. It proved to be a most intriguing conversation. Most flattering.

RUSSELL: Oh? In what way?

CAROLINE: They want my next book. And he asked me to run away with him.

JANE: She seemed exhilarated.

RUSSELL: Run away with him? Why?

CAROLINE: Oh, you are impossible! Maybe I will do it, leave Raymond behind to lament his unfeeling mistreatment of me when he had his chance! Then I will be living in sin in wicked London, and Raymond – and you – will be left behind here, pathetic *Onanists* for the rest of your lives!

JANE: End of scene!

LIGHTS OUT on ALL  
LIGHTS UP on JANE

JANE: But there is more!

LIGHTS UP on UTILITY ACTORS

JANE: Russell Daniel had found her, when she was not being temperamental, a fine companion. Now that she was becoming famous, it was also exciting to participate in activities that had been closed to him previously – such as the tea with reading of Caroline Joyce’s scenes at Lord K\_\_\_\_\_’s. That event had been splendid in its environment, much anticipated and attended. He had even helped select one scene that was read aloud, at her insistence. True, the reading had proven unsuccessful, largely because Lord K\_\_\_\_\_ had read the bulk of the scenes in a nasally monotone, with yawns contending with walk-outs, and Lord K\_\_\_\_\_ had ushered Caroline Joyce and Russell Daniel to the door rather peremptorily at the conclusion, with no further invitations offered or even politely hinted at. A reviewer from the *Times* had even been there incognito and wrote in the paper: “Authoress Smith Tea Leaves Bitter Taste.” Caroline Joyce, naturally, had become distraught at the reception of her work and partially blamed Russell Daniel for selecting a scene and encouraging her by going with her to the event. At lunch, near their college, just the two of them sat with their food uneaten between them.

CAROLINE: You know that I loathe the theatre. You should have persuaded me from it!

RUSSELL: It was an opportunity that you could not forego.

CAROLINE: Now I suppose you hate me. I have had such a public failure and in such lofty circumstances.

RUSSELL: Of course I do not hate you. I am not your friend because of that reading or because that particular reading did not go well. I hope I am not so shallow as that. I was your friend before, and I am your friend now.

CAROLINE: Oh, thank you, thank you! I am so grateful that you have stood by me in this trying time.

JANE: She picked up a peach and started to take a bite, then tossed it lightly onto the table.

CAROLINE: I cannot eat. I barely sleep.

JANE: She stared into his eyes.

CAROLINE: I do not know what I should do without you.

RUSSELL: Friends can most certainly help. Ultimately, though, we must persevere on our own. We must be our own final friend.

CAROLINE: I think you must be right. It is only that I find it so strenuous persevering on my own. I know that is weak of me, but sometimes, I confess, I am exceedingly weak. My dilemma is that the men I would depend upon so often let me down. There must be something in me that . . .

RUSSELL: Of course there isn't!

JANE: He did in fact think there was something specifically in her that might very well distress men, but he did not say that to her. Not now in her hour of unhappiness, probably never. He understood why her fiancé was hesitating; he understood why the representative from the London publisher had not run off with her after all, even though she had mentioned packing her luggage and waiting for him the Kentish Arms Inn for over seven hours.

CAROLINE: I can always count on you. For that I shall always be grateful.

JANE: They smiled. The book that Russell Daniel was writing in secret included a new chapter less than two weeks after that lunch with Caroline Joyce. He had read enough romances to know that he was supposed to save her from Raymond and propose marriage himself and that they were thereafter to enjoy a perfect pairdom in perpetuity. Yet he finally admitted to himself that her flirtatious behaviour towards him was deeply unsettling, perhaps more his fault than hers, for he had never clearly stated that he had no wish to marry her, had no designs on her person. He also had been tempted into actions that he knew would change his life forever. These were actions that he could not share with anyone in his life – not relatives, for they would disown

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him, not with friends, for they would ridicule and despise him, not with his colleagues, for they would seek to have him removed from his position at the college, not with his students, for they would run screaming from his presence. Even the novel to which he turned for comfort, to which he unburdened his terror and his anger (and his fleshly pleasures) concerning the new turn his life had taken (best not made clear even here, or anywhere, for that matter) might prove dangerous to his well-being as an upright citizen of his country, of his religion, and even of the human race. Should the book fall into the hands of the law he could be blackmailed, pilloried, prosecuted and sent to gaol for the actions and longings contained therein. For the truth was the actions and longings that he was now depicting in his novel were no longer mere figments, but realities!

LIGHTS UP on HANS-AXL

HANS-AXL: Oh, for God's sake, Jane! Get off this topic and concentrate on our marriage!

JANE: All in good time. All in good time.

HANS-AXL: I vill not listen!

JANE: Suit yourself!

HANS-AXL: You bet I suit myself! (Exits.)

JANE: Russell Daniel determined to clarify his relationship with Caroline Joyce once and for all, by showing her this novel. Its pages would tell of his guilt and frustration, his anxiety and rage. He knew her to be a kind and sympathetic person underneath the crochets and the states of agitation. They could be friends on an entirely different basis, without all the tension, without the misunderstandings. Yes, he would give her the manuscript. She had asked to read some of his work. Why not this novel, with all its raw, heartfelt passion, its nascent protest against the way the world judged men such as he? He handed her the manuscript the next time they finished lunch at the baker's shoppe.

RUSSELL: For you.

JANE: She was surprised.

CAROLINE: Oh? What is it, pray tell?

RUSSELL: My life.

JANE: He answered and turned to go.

LIGHTS OUT on ALL

END of ACT I

## ACT II

LIGHTS UP on JANE

JANE: There is more! . . . She let his novel sit on her desk for a full hour, not wishing to know its contents. Although she did not know exactly what would be in it, she had her suspicions. It could be a love story about another woman that Russell Daniel wanted desperately but could not have, because she was a Protestant! Or it could be a story about his life as a ghoul, roaming graveyards and devouring festering mouthfuls of decaying human flesh!

LIGHTS OUT on JANE  
LIGHTS UP on JANE

JANE: I am afraid that Hans-Axl and I have been quarreling, not about the marriage plans, which seem to be taking shape. The banns have been read once. The “paparazzi” have gotten wind of it and seem to be about to make a big to-do about this marriage in the tabloids. They even slipped a presumptuous offer to me under the front door, offering money for exclusive wedding pictures. If they think I am going to let them parade this poor head in a wedding veil once worn by someone named “Princess Di” next to Hans-Axl in his Neo-Nazi uniform, as they suggest in their note, they have another THINK COMING! (He has sworn to me that he has given up that “Neo” organisation altogether and has thrown away his uniform. And as if I would dream of wearing a used wedding veil!) Just when I thought they were about to give up on this house as a source of scandal, they now pounce on my wedding for their nefarious purposes.

LIGHTS UP on HANS-AXL

HANS-AXL: It would be way to get some money.

JANE: But one must draw the line somewhere! We have been quarreling the most, not over the offer from the tabloids or the marriage arrangements, but over what to do with my character Russell Daniel in my play. Hans wants him to be killed by Africans from Ghana with spears. I maintain that there were no likely Africans in England at the time in which the novel is set, 1810 or so. I cannot simply have Africans show up in order to kill the Homo! I suggested that it might be somebody from a right-wing Catholic organisation, but Hans says that is “a stereotype.” It is not that he objects to the “Real Catholics” killing the Homo, but he thinks it would be better for his cause if they shoot him when he and his Homo Agenda Troops, wearing their fruit-filled hats, are trying to assassinate the Pope in his Popemobile.

HANS-AXL: Of course!

JANE: I, on the other hand, think it may border on the preposterous. It may be enough to have Russell Daniel merely run off by night-coach to Paris in disgrace. We have been at each other’s throats over how to proceed. Hans has even called me a “propagandist for perversion” because I believe the character might even be shown with pity and horror, as with Aristotle, but not actually die in agony. Writing this play is proving more difficult than my previous ones since I do not truly know much at all about the subject matter I am dabbling in, and I suspect Hans-Axl’s information may be a little “dated” as well. P.P.S. He says that he is:



HANS-AXL: The wave of the future!

LIGHTS OUT on JANE and HANS-AXL  
LIGHTS UP on JANE

JANE: Despite everything, I press on!

LIGHTS UP on UTILITY ACTORS to act out what follows.

JANE: The story begins again from where Caroline Joyce has just read Russell Daniel's revealing novel manuscript about what she can only interpret as his 'other life.' Naturally, she has been devastated by its contents, about which she had been completely wrong! Caroline Joyce quite rightly, following his misplaced imposition of his Other Self on her, did not speak to Russell Daniel for six months. She had beseeched him not to give her details, and yet he had done so. The book was about erotic 'attraction' between males, one of them obviously based on Russell Daniel himself. (Caroline overreacts) There was even a scene of two males nuzzling each other! Nuzzling as if they enjoyed it and did not for one second feel anything but bliss! They had not spoken since he had given her his manuscript. She had, as would any woman of breeding, placed the manuscript in a sterilised satchel and left it for the secretary of the Departmental Office, to return to its author. She had been unable to find the strength to enclose a note, however brief, giving her thoughts about what she had read. Upon occasion, they had passed in the corridor, with both looking away. He, she imagined, expected her to say something to him, even if it was critical, but how could she bring up her very revulsion? Why had he not resigned from the Department? Clearly the man was no gentleman. Why had he not said he was sorry for having upset her so? The man was an unfeeling brute – although "brute" may not have been the exact word she wanted. Still, unfeeling he was indeed, thinking that she would want to read such a book even if it was by her best friend?! Yet, as was said, Caroline Joyce, in her goodness, had decided to forgive him. In her note she wrote the following:

CAROLINE: To Russell Daniel: As perhaps you know, I have married Raymond,. I am sorry that we could not invite you to the wedding. You must understand that Raymond did not think that you would fit in there. I agreed. Neither of us wanted our special day spoiled by ugly memories. For Raymond, it was you as his supposed 'rival' for my hand. For me, it was the way you imposed your 'style of life' upon me despite my unmistakable signals that hearing of any such thing was unacceptable to me. Do you realise that I had several unusually severe panic attacks when I realised that you had all along been trying to make me believe that you were considering marriage to me. What else were those carriage rides, those games of tennis, those rambles, readings, concerts, luncheons, and all the rest of it? It truly was most unfair of you to lead me on in that way! And yet I have decided to forgive you. My dear husband, Raymond, has proven, as I predicted, to be unwilling, even after marriage, to get out of our house much, the house that I have purchased in a 'posh' neighbourhood with my recent earnings from my book, plus the "advance" for my next two. There is even talk of editions in French, Dutch, and in America. Perhaps you saw the interview with me in the *Times* of London? There are others forthcoming in a fortnight from several ladies' magazines. So tedious, those journalists! Despite everything, I should like to have lunch again with you sometime. Do you think that would be a good idea? Naturally, I assume that you will *not* bring up the manuscript that

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you required me to peruse, or any of the events it contains or hints at. Why should we delve into areas best left vague, if even mentioned at all? How does this sound to you?  
 . . . Caroline Joyce.

JANE: Russell Daniel was understandably overjoyed to hear from her. He had very few friends and his family had disowned him, apparently because he had told them too – and in person! – of the ‘style of life’ that he had so thoughtlessly forced on poor Caroline Joyce. Hence he placed a note under her office door:

RUSSELL: Dear Caroline Joyce: Thank you so much. I have missed our lunches too. It would be delightful to continue our friendship. Name the day and time! . . . Russell Daniel

JANE: His note did not entirely please her, as it made reference to ‘naming the day and time,’ which she took as an allusion to the fact that he had so misled her into thinking that he was going to ‘name the day and time’ of their engagement. She hesitated for a day over this unfortunate lack of judgment on Russell Daniel’s part, but then she decided to forgive him for that as well. Caroline Joyce blushed to think how Christian she was being with all this forgiveness. They met the next week at a modest but acceptable hall in town for a day-time recital of edifying Hungarian Art Songs, translated from German lieder, the very latest rage in England. For propriety’s sake, they agreed to meet at the recital hall, where Raymond dropped her off in his father’s carriage and went somewhere on his own. Russell Daniel walked from his room in the faculty accommodations.

RUSSELL: Caroline Joyce!

JANE: He called gently to her when she did not appear to see him standing under an archway in the lobby of the recital hall. She had, of course, seen him immediately upon her arrival from the general carriage drop point; however, she pretended that she had *not*, lest he and others consider her to be unladylike in acknowledging a gentleman before he acknowledged her. Caroline Joyce, it must be said with approbation, was the very epitome of the finest taste and breeding of a young woman of 1810.

CAROLINE: Pray, are you still growing taller?

JANE: Asked Caroline Joyce when she finally ‘saw’ him under the archway.

RUSSELL: Perhaps inside, a bit.

JANE: She made a sour face for she did not care for his remark one tittle. It was obviously an allusion to his new-found ‘style of life,’ hardly in the best of taste, given the circumstances of their being there for edifying Hungarian Art Songs. Like him, she had dressed for the occasion. She had thrown a pale turquoise cloak as her wrap against the faint chill in the air. She had looked at herself in a knife blade at her new home and felt, thank you very much, that she looked like a fashion plate that she had recently seen in *The Lady’s Magazine*. They had several minutes to talk before the concert began, and he asked her:

RUSSELL: Would you like something to drink?

CAROLINE: Some tea, served in a be-flowered demitasse cup.

JANE: She even thought a lemon biscuit might please her. He did not purchase anything for himself since he had not yet been paid his salary that month and had but enough to pay for hers.

CAROLINE: Oh, do leave a gratuity as well!

JANE: Instructed Caroline Joyce, nodding at the drinks footman at his post at the counter. Russell Daniel hesitated for a second, wondering if he had any more coins on his person, then managed to find three tuppence in a pocket. He handed them to the drinks footman.

CAROLINE: I see that your manners have not improved. One always gives a gratuity to a drinks footman!

JANE: He flushed slightly.

RUSSELL: Would you care to leave one as well?

CAROLINE: Oh, men like to leave gratuities! It makes them feel powerful.

RUSSELL: Is that so?

JANE: Said he under his breath.

CAROLINE: Do not embarrass us with poverty! Having no money is hardly an excuse!

RUSSELL: Consider it my duty to supply gratuities on your behalf, just like in our old times whilst lunching together. (He bows toward her.)

CAROLINE: I carry very little money upon my person. What well-brought-up lady would not?!

RUSSELL: No pistol this evening, either?

CAROLINE: Are you going to be disagreeable?

JANE: Asked she with a good deal of pique. He decided to change the subject.

RUSSELL: Well, how are you and Raymond finding married life? Give him my best, by the way.

CAROLINE: Is that some sort of leading question?

JANE: She answered, her eyes narrowing. She took a quick sip of her tea from the demitasse cup.

RUSSELL: I thought it was quite a natural question.

CAROLINE: Oh, now you are an expert on what is natural and what is not, I see.

JANE: He bit his nether lip.

RUSSELL: I wonder if we should take our seats in the recital hall.

JANE: He had noticed that other patrons were starting to wander inside.

CAROLINE: Let us linger here for a few moments more. I do not wish to be overheard in our seats.

RUSSELL: As you wish.

CAROLINE: You seem uncomfortable..

JANE: She took a bite of her lemon biscuit.

CAROLINE: Oh, this tastes horrendous! (She hands it to him.) Can you dispose of this?

RUSSELL: Perhaps I should eat it.

CAROLINE: After I took a bite from it?

RUSSELL: I am somewhat peckish. I would hate to see it go to waste.

CAROLINE: I should have thought you did not wish it because *my awful lips* had touched it first,

JANE: Said she, as with a dagger. He furrowed his brow.

RUSSELL: Do you often find that most men wish to eat things because someone else has eaten a portion of it earlier?

CAROLINE: I am sure that I would not know. I barely eat anything anymore. I think you were a bad influence on me previously, with our syllabubs and whatnot. Now I have a plain half-biscuit all day with perhaps a half cup of tea, with no sugar of course. On a regular basis I have managed to write sixty pages or more in a sitting with none of those distractions of a carnal variety.

RUSSELL: Have you indeed?

CAROLINE: Raymond, of course, eats like a stallion. He makes me quite weary watching him.

RUSSELL: Indeed?

CAROLINE: As to our marriage, it is quite wonderful to be able to sit and tat in the evenings, when I am done teaching and writing, while dear Raymond is editing the articles we receive.

RUSSELL: Articles?

CAROLINE: Oh, yes, we have started a small press and a literary magazine with Raymond in charge. He has taken to it like a duck to ink. I knew it was just a matter of finding the appropriate position for him.

RUSSELL: And his drinking?

JANE: Russell Daniel wondered if he had gone too far.

CAROLINE: I limit him to a bottle of Bootles per day. (She wags her forefinger) That way he manages to stay awake and is never too many sheets to the wind, if that is the expression, and gets his editing done, all the while never being too fully alert. He says that being fully alert makes him deeply unhappy. I of course do everything to keep my Raymond utterly happy.

RUSSELL: It sounds like it is working out!

JANE: She glanced up into his face, seeming to hesitate as to whether she should speak more. At last she said:

CAROLINE: Certain parts of marriage came as rather a surprise to me.

JANE: Russell Daniel managed a smile.

RUSSELL: I do not know what to say.

CAROLINE: I had, yes, expected certain . . . untoward actions on the part of the husband. I cannot say if dear Raymond is typical or not, but he has done only a few . . . untoward things so far.

RUSSELL: I have heard that . . . some individuals . . . turn out to be much more . . . action-orientated, shall we say, once they are blessed with Holy Matrimony.

JANE: She held the lemon biscuit delicately against her cheek.

CAROLINE: I hope you are not asking if that is true of me?

RUSSELL: I mean anyone.

CAROLINE: I should think, on the contrary, that people are usually very much like their public selves when it comes to . . . actions . . . during . . . certain unavoidable parts of . . . marriage.

RUSSELL: Perhaps so.

JANE: Both were flustered by the tenor of the conversation.

CAROLINE: I have discovered one can get through anything life may bring one, if one just lies inert and lets it happen as it must, while praying with one's eyes closed. There is a great comfort in knowing that one is part of a Sacrament approved by Almighty God Himself.

RUSSELL: I see.

JANE: Said he.

CAROLINE: Oh, I am sorry! I suppose that is something you shall never experience, shall you – the Sacramental?

RUSSELL: I suppose I shall have to make do.

JANE: They moved to an archway next to the inner hall. Some people seemed to recognise Caroline Joyce or at least held a hand up to their mouths and made a comment of some kind, unheard by her or Russell Daniel.

RUSSELL: You are becoming famous.

CAROLINE: Yes, it has happened all so unbearably quickly. Believe me, I have not sought this feverish attention for myself, but merely a polite interest in my poor tales. You would hardly believe how many people I do not even know seek my company now. And yet I have chosen to spend time with you instead. (Gives a slight bow of her head.)

RUSSELL: How all must envy me then.

JANE: Said Russell Daniel as they passed through the doors to the recital room per se. There they settled into their chairs and looked around. There were some twenty handsome tall brass candlesticks set around the room, but naturally not lighted since it was day. Russell Daniel gestured at the carved mahogany railings of the small Rococo balcony.

RUSSELL: Are they not lovely? (Points)

CAROLINE: You should not point!

JANE: Caroline Joyce reprimanded.

RUSSELL: I thought I gestured, not pointed.

CAROLINE: One never points!

RUSSELL: I thought that was true of people, not of balconies.

CAROLINE: I am so glad that we are not here in the evening. I detest the smell of tallow.

RUSSELL: Those candles might be beeswax. And thus not quite so unpleasant.

CAROLINE: I think I know tallow from beeswax!

JANE: She rejoindered. Between Art Songs, they managed a desultory conversation.

CAROLINE: So have you written anything new? Perhaps something provocative – but not unseemly. Oh, no, don't tell me! Here I said that we must not talk of such things, and then I go and bring them up!

RUSSELL: I do not mind talking about my writing.

CAROLINE: Oh, I am sure you do not! Others may feel otherwise. I have finished a new novel that my publisher is very excited about.

RUSSELL: How grand! What is its nature?

CAROLINE: This one is about a rape in rural Bournemouth, a brother of a sister. I have never before set a book in Bournemouth.

JANE: She held the tips of her fingers to her mouth.

CAROLINE: Is it not a daring but marvelous subject? I must go there to research the layout of the city.

RUSSELL: And the rape? Have you researched that too?

CAROLINE: Oh, how could you!

JANE: She flew a few steps off across the room.

CAROLINE: What are you saying to me?

JANE: She made her way toward the counter where she had checked her cloak with a servant. Even though several patrons looked at him and her, Russell Daniel crossed to her, wanting to calm her anxiety.

RUSSELL: Pray, are you all right? I am sorry if I said something suggestive.

JANE: She was fanning her cheeks with both palms. As he grew nearer, however, a sudden fierce look came into her eyes. She stopped fanning herself and looked at him with a sneer and a touch of intense disdain.

CAROLINE: Why in the world would it matter if one such as *you* said something suggestive?!

JANE: She snapped.

CAROLINE: Oh, oh, I so do want to leave!

RUSSELL: Leave? The concert is only midway finished.

JANE: Nonetheless she turned toward the cloakroom and demanded her wrap from the young female servant. Russell Daniel followed her, a few steps behind.

RUSSELL: (calling) But, Caroline Joyce!

JANE: She was already attempting to don her cloak, having difficulty getting it to close around her shoulders.

RUSSELL: That poor woman is very distressed.

JANE: He thought. He reached out to help arrange the cloak more comfortably around her. Just then she stopped short, looked over her shoulder, and for a moment caught his face in her fiercest gaze, then turned away but did not move and raised one careful forefinger and, with a dismissive, withering *flick*, moved his hand from her body, and soon ran from the recital hall.

RUSSELL: Caroline Joyce!

JANE: He called, stopping at the door.

CAROLINE: Oh, as if you would know how a man acts!

JANE: She said, pulling her cloak around her and running off to find Raymond's carriage.

(The Utility Actors exit)

JANE: Well, I guess she taught him a lesson, did she not?

HANS-AXL: *Ja! Gut!*

LIGHTS OUT on JANE and HANS-AXL

LIGHTS UP on JANE and HANS-AXL

JANE: We have had the three banns for our wedding read at the Catholic church nearby. No one has objected! Is that not good news? The priest there, Father Stanhope, told Hans that the "paparazzi" were planning to set up cameras both inside and outside St. Margaret Mary's to get the wedding photographs that I have been unwilling to authorise. Even Hans agrees that he does not want to be photographed under such circumstances. We can certainly use the money, but he says that my double chin "looks bad" and makes it seem like he is marrying "an *alte Landsau!*" Isn't he darling? I must say that he is very good to me, and last night he even tidied me up after I had a coughing spell.

HANS-AXL: (muttering) I had to pick her nose, all enkrusted! So disguzting! For this I don't get any pay!

JANE: Therefore, Father Stanhope has agreed to conduct the ceremony here in this former rectory, even though it was Anglican, not Catholic. It will be very private. Date not yet set. I am sorry that you will not be attending, but, all in all, that is best. I am happy to report that as a pre-wedding gift, Hans has opened the shutters to my bedroom window once again. I still have to stay back so as not to be overly much observed by the "paparazzi." He says they are "leeches" attempting to get "free pictures," and he even chased one who had placed a ladder against the



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outside wall and climbed up halfway to this floor. They even scuffled. Fortunately, Hans-Axl was not hurt, but the “paparazzi” person apparently plans to sue Hans for “assault.” I suppose we will have to deal with that eventually, one hopes after the wedding, the honeymoon, and the completion of my play. For the wedding, Hans says that we can have German chocolate cake and Bruiser the dog can stay for an hour. As a pre-wedding gift, he also has opened the shades of my room . I've so enjoyed looking out the window again. I saw Bouncer, the chestnut horse, for the first time in a long while. He seems to have forgiven the female horse for invading his pasture, and the two of them stand side by side, head to tail, tail to head, in the most loving way. Brings tears to my eyes. Have I told you about the conservative Muslim family on the other side of us? Hans tells me that the woman appears to be pregnant again, with triplets, no less. He went over there for a visit. And now he has given me what he calls yet another pre-wedding wedding gift.” He asked the Muslim father if he could borrow one of the wife’s face veils, a niqab, I think it is called. My Arabic is rusty! (Puts on the head head and face coverings.) So now I will be wearing both my new hijab and niqab. Hans wants me to wear the niqab and hijab not only because he likes the style on me but because hesays, “*Ich bin ecumenical!*” (I think that is the phrase.)

HANS-AXL: The niqab also hides that ugly double chin since you refuse the lipo, fatzo!

JANE: Isn't he something! Never afraid to speak his mind! Truth told, I do somewhat fear the liposuction on my chin. What do you think? The niqab and hijab combination might even make a lovely wedding veil, as something “borrowed,” to go with something “blue,” “old,” and “new.” I still have my eyes uncovered. I am so lucky! Life is beautiful, and we must be grateful for what we have for as long as we have it. Excuse me for chattering on. I used to be able to do so with my dear sister, Cassandra, in days long, long ago. . . before I “died.”

LIGHTS OUT on JANE and HANS-AXL

LIGHTS UP on JANE

JANE: I press on with the play! Tell me your reactions, won't you? Only the Good Lord knows when I may be able to return to it again. Whenever darling Captain Hans-Axl has been unable to act an my care-giver, bright, caring Mrs. Nuhrani from next door is filling in. They are my every-present Muses! So the play continues! Some time passed after the episode where Caroline Joyce flicked her dismissive finger at Russell Daniel's hand as he helped with her cloak at the concert, without either of them speaking to the other.

(Enter the Utility Actors to mime the parts.)

Each saw the other in the corridors at the small Catholic college where they were instructors, but a very real uneasiness had developed between them, and both took pains to avoid eye contact, and there were no luncheons together, and certainly no more picnics, carriage rides, or musical outings. For a time Caroline Joyce had decided that she had best try to find satisfaction within the confines of her marriage, even though Raymond continued to drink heavily and often, and rarely wanted to leave their abode. She wondered if she should have a child, and even suspected one morning that such a blessed event might in truth be forthcoming, only to learn, subsequently, that she had been mistaken.

(Enter Mrs. Nuhrani, in conservative Muslim attire. She is a young woman.)

MRS. NUHRANI: Such a pity for her!

JANE: Oh, Mrs. Nuhrani, how nice of you to come over.

MRS. NUHRANI: I heard your play was a mess. So I come! Go on, you people! I critique!

JANE: Caroline Joyce's relief at this news filled her with such joyfulness, she realised that having a child could never, ever be as fulfilling to her as the news that she was not having one did. Therefore, she took measures, best left imprecise, to make sure that she would not find herself in such a predicament again.

MRS. NUHRANI: There are such measures?

JANE: Her husband did not seem to notice and only troubled her for . . . affection upon rare occasions. One day Caroline Joyce even suspected that Raymond might be sleeping with another woman, the char-girl who tidied up their home on Tuesdays at the same hour as one of her classes at the college. At first she was aghast at that possibility and how it might explain her husband's infrequent solicitations of her marital debt. Soon, however, she added a Thursday hour to the char-girl's schedule, and all three seemed to enjoy the resulting domestic tranquility.

MRS. NUHRANI: A man can have up to four wives.

JANE: Meanwhile, Caroline Joyce continued to write her stories with indefatigable vigour, and it was rumored that she wore out at least three goose quills per writing session, and once was seen pursuing a goose while she (Caroline Joyce) was on a supposed afternoon walk by a nearby stream, and only ceased plucking the poor creature's feathers from its body when dissuaded by Lord Erskine, an early anti-vivisectionist who happened to be passing by in a punt on the stream. Caroline Joyce, naturally, denied the charges. . . . Russell Daniel seemed to grow in handsomeness with each passing day. While never a Beau Brummell, he was fastidious in his personal hygiene and even bathed several times a week.

MRS. NUHRANI: Nevertheless, he is a perv, correct?

JANE: He began his own writing in earnest at this time, penning a heartfelt, but unseemly, novel that he feared would never see the light of publication, so disturbing in its sexuality was it for 1811, and yet he plugged on, turning out a paragraph here, a paragraph there, hiding the manuscript in a secret compartment of his desk in his lonely room near the campus. At times he felt at sea about how to proceed, how much to detail, how much to disguise, how much to protest what he felt to be injustice for one subterranean segment of society. He felt that he was breaking new ground, terrified of disgust and discomfort and even dismemberment by some, and still wishing to create a dramatic Cry of Protest that would shake the very foundations of the barriers about whose lives could be portrayed, and whose could not – or not in the way that he was portraying them at least, as though his subterranean characters had actual human feelings!

MRS. NUHRANI: He is lost and will burn in the many fires of Hell forever!

JANE: Still, Russell Daniel wrote on, for he felt that he could no longer hide in a world of darkness! No, the characters were not vampires! What they were is best left unsaid.

MRS. NUHRANI: I must to agree! Already you say too much!

JANE: At the end of the term that spring, Russell Daniel accepted a position at a different school, one in London, which catered for the education of the bastard offspring of military personnel, Members of the Upper House of Parliament, and the clergy (exclusively). He thought it time to leave the parochial world of rural Kent behind and try his luck in a more cosmopolitan environment. London had almost one million people in it, and he wanted to explore their intricacies, engage in witty exchanges at coffee houses, perhaps even join a young men's Leisure Club, and continue to write his current novel, with perhaps many more to follow.

MRS. NUHRANI: Not hanged publicly?!

JANE: He was pondering whether to inform Caroline Joyce of his upcoming departure, not so much because of their present connection but because they had been close not that long before. It would be rude simply to leave without a word, and yet he did not want to stir more misunderstandings about his "interest" in her. Besides, her fame had grown by leaps and bounds in only a few months' time. Her name was increasingly discussed in the periodicals; she was even given a grant from the Prince Regent's Bequest for Aspiring Ladies Who Write Novels. People seemed infatuated with her, especially her large, manic eyes, and already there was heated dispute about whether she wrote too much and whether her violent writing was "ladylike" or not. Finally, late one afternoon Russell Daniel happened upon Caroline Joyce as he was leaving campus for his room. She was carrying four copies of her newest book, *Wunderlove*, having just returned from the campus postal office and having torn off the outside wrapping. She was staring at the topmost copy of her book with a glazed and fixed aspect to her eye and hence did not notice his approach. He was checking the neatness of his new brown pantaloons in the glass of a window as he strode along and thus missed seeing her. Ultimately, they bumped into one another. Sparks did not fly, unless one counts her irritation.

CAROLINE: Could you not see me standing here with these copies of my new novel? I am indeed chagrined that I was momentarily distracted.

RUSSELL: I beg your pardon.

CAROLINE: So should you!

JANE: She went on with some animation.

CAROLINE: One would think you were seeking me out.

RUSSELL: That was never my intention.

JANE: Said he, with a slight bow.

RUSSELL: I will take my leave.

JANE: Another bow followed, and he turned to go.

CAROLINE: I suppose you ought to know that I am ecstatically happy with my husband, Raymond.

RUSSELL: Yes, I know your husband's name is Raymond. I am very pleased for you.

JANE: Again he turned to leave.

CAROLINE: Of course Percival Blossom, the chair, has shown an undue amount of interest in myself of late.

RUSSELL: Has he?

JANE: She waved a fluttery hand in the air.

CAROLINE: I suppose I should not be telling anyone this, as I am a thoroughly happy married woman! I know that you do not care one whit for me, but some men around here do.

RUSSELL: How grand.

JANE: He waited patiently since she did not seem to want to leave.

CAROLINE: And of course that representative of the book publisher returned the other day and apologised for not showing up at the Kentish Arms Hotel that time. This time I sent him packing, let me tell you!

RUSSELL: Did you?

CAROLINE: He just wanted me now that I have become famous. Are you aware that I have become famous?

RUSSELL: It has not gone unnoticed.

CAROLINE: I don't care for being famous. Everybody wants something from me. I gave a speech at Hove, and some country bumpkin asked me if I write with a goose quill and seemed to want nothing more than to drain my brains, my talent, as if the brains or the talent resided in the instrument of composition!

RUSSELL: It must be trying to be so famous.

CAROLINE: At least I know that you did not seek out my friendship for any ulterior reason – any whatsoever. And for that I am grateful, Russell Daniel, however unfortunate things between us seem to have developed.

RUSSELL: Life has vicissitudes.

CAROLINE: Is that Pliny the Elder?

RUSSELL: I thought it was primarily me.

JANE: She looked down at the volumes in her hands and then at him.

CAROLINE: Would you like me to give you a copy of my new novel?

RUSSELL: Really? That is too thoughtful of you, Caroline Joyce. But I could not accept such a gift.

CAROLINE: Oh, but you must! Perhaps some day, when in hardship, you can sell it! (Laughs)  
Here, let me write something on the first page.

JANE: Before he could protest more, she flipped open the cover and produced a goose quill from her fichu, which protected the modesty of her bodice. She thought momentarily, then put pen to paper and wrote. These are her words:

CAROLINE: "To Russell Daniel, with admiration for your talent and gratitude for your friendship before anyone else knew of me! –Your Dear, Best Friend, Caroline Joyce."

RUSSELL: Thank you.

JANE: He whispered, quite touched by the inscription. But when he looked up at Caroline Joyce, she was patting her bodice and hyperventilating.

CAROLINE: I must flee this place now! I cannot stay here!

RUSSELL: What is wrong? Are you all right?

JANE: She flipped her head from side to side, surveying the corridor.

CAROLINE: I saw Brother Manfred, the visiting Cistercian poet monk, staring at me from his office down the way.

JANE: As Russell Daniel started to turn his head in that direction, she said:

CAROLINE: Don't look! Pray, don't look!

RUSSELL: But –

CAROLINE: Have a good life in London!

JANE: She called as she fled the scene.

CAROLINE: Oh, I hope I may escape Brother Manfred's insistent pursuit!

JANE: And away, away she ran. Before he left, Russell Daniel did look to see if Brother Manfred or anyone else was staring, peering, glaring, glancing, or simply looking out from his office. But he saw no one, no one at all, *no* one.

RUSSELL: (sadly) Oh, Caroline Joyce, Caroline Joyce . . .

LIGHTS OUT on ALL  
LIGHTS UP on JANE and MRS. NUHRANI

MRS. NUHRANI: Wait! There's more!

JANE: A year went by in a twinkling. Caroline Joyce Smith continued her ascent into the pantheon of Writers Who Matter, and was even short-listed for the Regency Prize, given biannually to the author or authoress most likely to display the United Kingdom as a place superior to France. Her marriage to Raymond remained intact, although she, it must be confirmed, was always on the lookout for a more suitable partner, as will be revealed later in our story.

(Enter Russell.)

Russell Daniel found London dynamic and rather worldly, just as he had hoped. He managed to complete his newest novel, about his subterranean world, and entitled it *Something Never Allowed*. He chose a pseudonym to use as author, Daniel Lord-Willing, a flirtation with the aristocracy, with that hyphenated name, that his low birth in no way entitled him. It also hid his real name and thus provided some small protection against prosecution. He was even able to obtain a literary agent, who through sheer persistence succeeded in selling the manuscript to a respectable, if wary, publisher. It was the happiest day of his life when he received the note from the literary agent, and there was even to be an "advance" of fifty pounds, a luxurious sum. To bask in the joy of the greatest moments in his entire life, he went out to dinner with new friends and ordered cake and champagne for all four in celebration.

MRS. NUHARANI : See how they flaunt it!

JANE: However, the book did not receive a single notice in the British press, unlike Caroline Joyce's books, which were now noticed everywhere. Already there was serious talk of her becoming a Dame, and she was not yet twenty-nine years old. Of his novel, *Something Never Allowed*, the only mention was in a Welsh journal called Spiffy that called it "a masterpiece, but not for everyone." Why not everyone, if it was a masterpiece? Russell Daniel wondered. He knew immediately that his publisher was not happy with the sales, and another manuscript that he offered was rejected in no uncertain terms.

MRS. NUHRANI: God is great!

JANE: He went into several bookstores and discovered that his novel was being sold under the counter "lest it fall into the hands of elderly patrons, who might die of shock" according to one clerk.

RUSSELL: I have indeed taken on quite a taboo, yet some must be pioneers.

JANE: Russell Daniel reassured himself. Still, the prospect of not making any money from sales and with so little coverage in the press, he was beginning to think that perhaps he had chosen the wrong path.

RUSSELL: Am I just being stubborn?

JANE: He asked himself.

RUSSELL: Perhaps I have ventured into realms that the world will never permit except as Bad Examples with Suitable Punishments, as in my school-boyhood texts.

JANE: The job that he had taken in London likewise was not as marvelous as he had been led to believe it might be. The illegitimate offspring of the aristocracy and others had many learning disabilities, and their essays were a nightmare to decipher, and often were even “soiled” with substances best not examined too closely. He hand-wrote applications to every college in the United Kingdom and even some in America, asking for a position, but he received only two nibbles in return. And those evaporated when the actual subject of his published novel came up during the two interviews he had. One of the interviewers sent him an unsigned note with this message:

UTIL.ACTOR #2: We all thought your interviewed splendidly; however, upon discovery of the specific subject matter of your book, we have no choice but to decline your application. If I may, on a personal note, give you some advice: it would be: The blade of grass that sticks up gets cut down.

JANE: The other school also sent a note:

UTIL. ACTOR #1: We loved you, and I personally LOVED your book, but we simply cannot have our school associated with your Topic. Sorry. But if you are in Chichester again, do give me a call. Lionel Fairwether, M.A.

JANE: It therefore came as a welcome, almost nostalgic, surprise when Russell Daniel received a note from Caroline Joyce as well!

CAROLINE: Dearest Russell Daniel, the reason I am writing to you is that Raymond and I are moving to London for a year. my publisher, John Murray, has arranged it all with my having to give a speech or two here and there (something for the Prince Regent at a palace, I think, and possibly something involved with Lady Somebody or Other). He wants me to write a novel set in fashionable London and thinks I can absorb the atmosphere best if I live there. I told him that I am more than capable of imagining London, thank you very much, but I simply could not resist the offer. We are to have a seven-room apartment in Mayfair, three footmen, and a lady’s maid. All expenses paid by the publisher! For some reason, tons and tons of people seem to want to buy my books. It is a complete and utter mystery to me why this is so. There is talk of a coach and four to be available three days per week. It will not turn my head in the slightest. Naturally I have told the chairman that it is merely a leave of absence and that I will return to teaching here next year. I would never dream of giving up the security of my position here for some flibbertigibbet whirligig in London. Which brings me to you! I don’t know a soul in London except for John Murray and YOU. The publisher has promised to introduce me to the literati, even Sir Walter Scott and Lord Byron, but promises are easy to make. You are someone I actually know, and I do hope that you and I can meet for luncheons and drives and

CONT'D.

wonderful talks again, just the way we used to, with of course a complete understanding on my part that you and I can never be more than just good friends. So sorry for any misunderstandings in the dreary old past. What do you say? Can you find time for a former friend? . . . Fondly, Caroline Joyce.

JANE: Russell Daniel hesitated to reply, fearing not so much a repetition of any misunderstandings about who they might be to each other, as that he would be expected to continue to be completely silent about his new life, while she would be free to bring up anything she wished. He had managed to do this before, but now he felt that he was being required to talk “with one arm tied behind my back. Nevertheless, Russell Daniel was flattered that Caroline Joyce had remembered him with fondness and was seeking him out. Very few others were seeking him out for anything. The publisher said that his novel had “come out too soon” and it would be remaindered in month or two. Obviously, the publisher had grown cautious, even timid, once the novel was between hard covers and the anticipated “underground” readership had not materialised.

RUSSELL: If only readers were not so frightened of being looked at askance, insulted, or possibly arrested, sales might have fared better.

MRS. NUHRANI: May Allah torture him with a thousand Qurans up his anus! May he turn into a Jew!

JANE: There are some who might have felt for Russell Daniel’s predicament and urged him onward, for, if nothing else, what he was writing had not been written about a million times before.

MRS. NUHRANI: It is not Adam and Steve; it is Allah and the Prophet!

JANE: But of course what Russell Daniel was trying to foist on the world was, upon reflection, unpleasing to the refined, un-amiable to the fastidious, and sinful to the spiritual. So his continuing efforts not to accept the reception of his world by the Forces That Be of 1811 and to persist in his futile attempt to alter his “kind” being sniggered at and dismissed by some, castigated and condemned by others, and censored and re-written by most, could only mark him for what was about to befall him next.

MRS. NUHRANI: About time!

JANE: When Caroline Joyce arrived in London with Raymond in tow, they met in a tea-and-coffee bread-and-butter shop near Mayfair, and while none of the three felt an embrace was appropriate, Caroline Joyce seemed quite delighted to see Russell Daniel again. And he, her. In no time they were chatting away as if the two years and the issues that had come between them were no more. Even Raymond chimed in, as he surreptitiously popped gin into his dark roast coffee, and said one or two things that made sense. Caroline Joyce herself was full of news about how John Murray had offered her a pony for rides around the mansion they were staying in, but she had declined the offer since, as she pointed out, her mad sister had once been trampled by a pony and had had to have her spleen removed.

CAROLINE: It is best not to tempt family fate!



JANE: Caroline Joyce opined. She also mentioned, slyly, that Sir Walter Scott had sent his card, two cards in fact, one of them asking if she would consider reading the manuscript of a new novel of his, *The Heart of Midlothian*, in three volumes, to see if it should be longer. She said that she might consider his offer but worried that it was too long already and would never be able to find a polite way to inform Sir Walter of such. She even asked Russell Daniel about his own writing. She was having bread and butter. She cut the crust from her bread and pushed it to the side.

RUSSELL: A novel of mine is now in print.

CAROLINE: Truly? It is from some obscure, possibly Parisian, press?

RUSSELL: John Murray brought it out.

CAROLINE: He did! How amazing!

RUSSELL: It has been a bit of a difficult sell.

CAROLINE: Has it, then?

JANE: Caroline Joyce said, placing a finger at the top of her pursed lips.

CAROLINE: I wonder why.

RUSSELL: I suspect it is a bit ahead of its time.

CAROLINE: Do you actually?

RUSSELL: Perhaps time will be good to it.

CAROLINE: Surely if you had altered it in certain ways, it would have fared more propitiously, don't you feel?

RUSSELL: In that case it may not have been the same book.

CAROLINE: I suspect that it found its way into print because of its content, not despite it, and the sales are what they must be. Or is that a rude thing to say?

JANE: Russell Daniel bit his lip.

CAROLINE: You should have obtained a blurb for John Murray to put on the book jacket. Surely, you could have gotten something from the Marquis de Sade in prison, couldn't have you?

RUSSELL: I am afraid I am unacquainted with him.

CAROLINE: Really? I always thought your sort knew each other.

RUSSELL: Not invariably.

CAROLINE: You will be happy to know that a book I am reviewing for the *Times*. It has a scene in it similar to one in the *Satyricon*, which I have, I admit, never read. It must be something like what you have written, a goatish gentleman pursuing a lad of nine, if I have it correct.

JANE: She buttered her de-crusted bread with one deft move.

RUSSELL: I believe you are conflating two different worlds.

CAROLINE: Oh, I think not! Pederasts are coming out of the wainscoting everywhere, it seems.

RUSSELL: I would not know, never having encountered one in my entire life.

CAROLINE: But then you are so young! There is still time. Perhaps it is something one learns as one ages.

JANE: She took a bite of her buttered bread.

CAROLINE: But then what do I know of the whole subject! It is, I fear, quite beyond my delicate comprehension. I did write another review for the *Times* about some avant-garde roué (and we all know what that means) without feeling the need to actually read his book!

JANE: The coffee cup was slightly a-tremble in Russell Daniel's hand.

RUSSELL: One of the reasons I wrote my book is to help clear up such confusion in the general world.

CAROLINE: It is probably best that people not know there are these things at all.

MRS. NUHRANI: Allah is not merciful unless it is a female child bride for a normal adult man!

JANE: The conversation moved on to less contentious topics, and there was much laughter and gossip from all three: about Sister Crucifixa back at the college in Kent, who had suffered food poisoning from her gruel, about Percival Blossom, the department chairman, whom Caroline Joyce said she had written into a story as a humpbacked dwarf, and even some hints that she had done a "merry jape portrait" about Russell Daniel in the same book.

CAROLINE: Not to worry. No one will know it is you since you are not famous enough!

JANE: She explained. And Brother Manfred, the Cistercian poet monk, had been found shot to death in the school's chapel under mysterious circumstances. Russell Daniel wondered if Caroline Joyce still carried a pistol in her reticule. Her eyes seemed to roll somewhat less in her head, and she had not mentioned anyone following her with romantic intentions, but perhaps that was because her husband was present, if befogged.

CAROLINE: I would hope that you would never write about me in anything of yours.

JANE; Said she to Russell Daniel as they wound up their get- together. It would hardly be gentlemanly of you.

RUSSELL: I see that you favor the double standard.

CAROLINE: Oh, it is not the same thing at all. If you wrote about me, people would know it was I, now that I have become so intolerably famous, whereas you are still unknown.

RUSSELL: Believe me, I am trying to alter that.

CAROLINE: Why? Do you really and truly want to be known as the author of a book about such a disturbing subject matter?

RUSSELL: I see a time when my subject matter might not be so disturbing.

CAROLINE: How can you think such a thing?

RUSSELL: It takes someone to have the courage to take the initial steps.

CAROLINE: Yes, I suppose the first man ever to fornicate with his sister blazed a trail that we all can only follow.

RUSSELL: I would not argue for incest, even of the consenting variety.

JANE: He could not but notice that Caroline Joyce had become much more un-reticent about actually mentioning certain 'disturbing' subject matter aloud.

CAROLINE: Oh, you seem, then, to make distinctions between how 'disturbing' various subject matter may or may not be.

RUSSELL: I think one must. I would not argue for the legalisation of everything 'disturbing,' just certain things that are needlessly 'disturbing.'

CAROLINE: I think Sister Crucifix would be more than a little disconcerted if she could hear you now.

RUSSELL: I am afraid that I have left Sister Crucifixa and her gruel behind, both geographically and figuratively.

CAROLINE: There is much to be said for nuns as characters in fiction, I do believe.

RUSSELL: Better there than in real life.

CAROLINE: Are you no longer a Catholic then?

RUSSELL: I see a conflict between the beliefs imposed upon me at birth and those I presently espouse.

CAROLINE: I too. But a prayer said before class goes a long way to maintaining the public pieties.  
I do not wish to forfeit my teaching position.

RUSSELL: I do not think I could ever return to the restrictions of my early days.

CAROLINE: Oh, you males are so caught up in the literalness of it all! Marching off to wars!  
Missionaries in equatorial regions! Just for ideas! Ideas are not real!

JANE: Caroline Joyce tossed a discarded bread crust toward her husband's coffee cup.

RAYMOND: Don't spill it! (Played by Utility Actor #1)

JANE: Raymond said, cupping his fingers around the container.

CAROLINE: Oh, you!

JANE: She cried, making eye contact with Russell Daniel, as if to say, "See what you have forced  
me to endure in this man!"

RUSSELL: Perhaps drink would help? You still never drink alcohol?

CAROLINE: Sweetening here drinks enough for two!

JANE: She answered, slightly slapping Raymond's arm. But he did not seem to notice, as his eyes had  
shut in a stupor. Russell Daniel wondered if he should mention the Temperance Societies that  
were springing up. But he was not sure his suggestion would be welcomed.

RAYMOND: What about that girl in your story with the stigmata between her legs?

JANE: Raymond suddenly blurted out.

RAYMOND: Now that is a story I really loved. Was the stigmata supposed to be a symbol?

JANE: Raymond seemed to be carrying on some inner dialogue with himself.

CAROLINE: There, there, shut up, Precious.

JANE: Caroline Joyce said, pinching one of his knuckles.

CAROLINE: This is why I so seldom let Raymond read my work. He tends to sputter with  
uncontrolled enthusiasm.

RAYMOND: But *was* it? When the friars see the blood on her gown is it supposed to be a symbol of  
Christ's redeeming blood?

CAROLINE: Raymond, please!

JANE: Russell Daniel had noticed this trait before. She seemed not to wish to discuss the extravagant events in her work, did not even wish to admit that she had written them, all the while pouring them forth in book after book. . . .

(The three actors say their goodbyes.)

Soon the three said their goodbyes, and they parted for the evening. All in all, Russell Daniel thought it had proven to be a worthwhile visit. He was looking forward to many more during Caroline Joyce's time in London. He was a bit lonely, more than a bit at sea about many things: his employment, his writing, obtaining a possible 'friend' of a 'special' nature, ready to continue his quest to add something original to the world's literature. However, when he return to his rented room, he found a message from the school where he was now teaching. It had been misdelivered to his landlady's apartment, and she had slipped it under his door. It said:

(The Chairman appears.)

UTIL.ACTOR #1: Certain allegations about a book you have written and consequently about you have been leveled by "unnamed sources" and these are of "a serious and unsavoury character." As Head of the Department I am asking you to resign. It will be very difficult for me to assign classes to you under these circumstances, as I am sure you can appreciate.

(Enter Caroline and Russell.)

JANE: Meanwhile, Caroline Joyce likewise felt the evening before had gone very well. She felt more at ease around her friend Russell Daniel that she ever had before and she looked forward again to delightful times, for the man was definitely companionable. The Mayfair apartment was elegant, the royalties were pouring in, fan letters followed her even to London, and her new book was humming along without a hitch. Yes, her husband was rather an anchor, but an anchor had both good and bad aspects, if looked at correctly. She was especially overjoyed that Russell Daniel had not flaunted his new life in front of her. He seemed to be such a good sport and had laughed as hard as she had at her parting remark:

CAROLINE: How are you faring financially?

RUSSELL: At the moment I am maintaining. The future in a year from now I am not so sure about.

CAROLINE: Well, I hope that you will have enough to last at least while I am here! I know how much you love to tip for the two of us!

JANE: With a gay wave, she rode off in her carriage and four.

(Caroline waves and exits.)

(Russell waves but does not exit.)

JANE: It came as a surprise to her when a letter from Russell Daniel arrived at the Mayfair apartment three days later.

RUSSELL: Monday. Dear Caroline Joyce, I meant to mention this to you the other night, but somehow it did not seem the right moment. I probably should wait until we have lunch again to bring it up. But certain developments in my life have forced my hand. I know that you found my novel ‘disturbing,’ and I imagine there is little I can do about that except to hope for a day when honesty will replace secrecy, if indeed such a day will ever come. I hope my book will help bring about that day. I would never ask anyone to write a review of a book she has not read, nor would I, further, ask anyone to recommend a book a person did not wish to recommend. However, you mentioned two things at our get-together that struck me. First, you said that you were writing reviews for the *Times*, and it occurred to me that you might possibly be able to give a review copy of my novel to somebody there. I believe the publisher sent one. (I sent one myself, to be safe.) No mention has appeared, and I have learned from a reliable source that the *Times* never runs reviews on my Topic or anything close to it, unless the review is decidedly negative. I find myself so in need of a mention in the *Times* that I would settle for a negative review, perhaps inspiring a “scandale” and hence larger sales. Apparently there is no life for a book without a mention in the *Times*. I am *not* asking you to write this review, just to see if you get the book reviewed by somebody there. Second, you wrote in your new book “with admiration for your talent and gratitude for your friendship before anyone else knew of me! – Your Dear, Best Friend.” I was extremely flattered and cheered by your words. Your Dear Friend, Russell Daniel.

LIGHTS OUT on RUSSELL  
LIGHTS UP on CAROLINE

CAROLINE: Wednesday. Dear Russell Daniel, you have destroyed our friendship. I cannot tell you how disappointed I was by your note to me. Now that my name appears frequently and prominently in both literary and lower circles, I am beseeched constantly. I thought you were the one person that I could count on to ask nothing of me. I was wrong. You spoke of financial difficulties and neglect of your book. Yet you are employed teaching those illegitimate children, are you not? It may not be an ideal situation, but one must be grateful for what comes one’s way. After all, you could be in a full-body cast with psoriasis or develop that horrible disease the late King George had, porphyria, I believe it is called. One’s urine turns quite purple and there are spells of imbecility. Consider yourself fortunate that you have none of these problems. I do not wish to write a review of your novel. Even if I do not have to read it. No one helped me with my first book. Why do you expect me or anyone else to help you? I think you never should have given up our college in rural Kent for the uncertainties of London. I certainly would not have, without the contractually obligated assistance of a major publishing firm. But off you ran! Quite honestly, I do not see why you felt, and evidently continue to feel, that people want to hear about That Topic, despite all evidence to the contrary. You could have written about Gothic virgins in peril or ghouls feeding on the patients in Bedlam Hospital. Again, not *you!* It pains me to write this note to you. But write it I must. . . . Caroline Joyce. P.S. And to think I had been so relieved at our meeting that you had not asked to borrow any money!

RUSSELL: Friday. Dear Caroline Joyce, I am very sorry if my note gave you pain. That was never my intention. I just had learned that I will be losing my teaching position here because my novel has been “found out” by the authorities, even though I used a pseudonym and

CONT'D.

mentioned it to no one I teach with. Certainly not to my students. I find myself in rather desperate straits. I do not think I will be able to secure a letter of reference, my funds are depleted, and my book is not being mentioned. I do think it is ground-breaking. I did not mean in any way to imply that you should review it, just get it into Possible Hands. More than that I cannot expect. I am very, very sorry if you thought I meant to pressure you in an unseemly way. (However, you did seem not to mind that you have written at least one review for the *Times* of a book which you have not even read. I was surprised.) I guess I hoped that you would see us as writers joined in an attempt to bring out respective visions to a new readership. Who knows — maybe we could even be the beginning of a New Literary Era, my Henry Fielding to your Aphra Behn. Wouldn't that be something!? You said that nobody helped you with your first book. Well, it was not the London *Times*, I acknowledge, but I did organise that discussion panel at the college when your first collection appeared. Trust me, nobody was at all interested, but I badgered them to read the book and agree to discuss it publicly. I also loaned my copy to the editor of the local newspaper, which gave it a paragraph, which you may have missed since other, larger publications soon began to admire your work. Forgive me for pointing this out, but it is not quite factual that “nobody” helped you. I am heartily sorry that I troubled you with any troubles of my own. I should have dealt with them myself without burdening you with them. I hope you will forgive me, and I will never ask such a thing of you again, I vow.  
Your Friend, Russell Daniel.

JANE: He received an envelope soon thereafter with his own letter inside and these words handwritten on the outside:

CAROLINE: Dear Russell Daniel, I have agonized over this for . . . many minutes, and I have decided to return your letter un-opened. . . . Caroline Joyce Smith.

LIGHTS OUT on ALL  
LIGHTS UP on JANE and HANS-AXL

HANS-AXL: *Gut* for her!

JANE: What do you think? He is no gentleman in bringing up favors he supposedly did for her. I understand why the woman feels she had no choice but to banish this man from her life forever, but is she perhaps a trifle unkind to someone she has loved?

HANS-AXL: She did not promote his Homo Agenda! Shame is holy!

LIGHTS UP on MRS. NUHRANI

MRS. NUHRANI: Indeed, good for that woman! She does not drink alcohol! And that man would try to destroy Islam! “Punish the unbelievers with garments of fire, hooked iron rods, boiling water; melt their skin and bellies.” Koran 22:19!

LIGHTS OUT on ALL  
LIGHTS UP on JANE  
LIGHTS UP on UTILITY ACTRESS #1

UTIL.ACTRESS #1: Excuse me, Miss Austen. May I speak with you a moment?

JANE: You don't like the play?

UTIL.ACTRESS #1: I do have some questions. Don't you think she is being unduly influenced by certain people? Their opinions seem so harsh. I myself have never engaged in homosexual conduct of any sort, having no inclination in that direction, so it's not personal. But their attitudes seem, to say the least, old-fashioned. I get the feeling that you, as the author, would like to treat Russell Daniel more sympathetically than those around you do.

JANE: Well, considering the play is set in 1810 or so, it seems to me that she is quite liberal and generous to him.

UTIL.ACTRESS #1: Really? Well, it's your play, suppose!

LIGHTS UP on HANS-AXL

HANS-AXL: Just play your part! Stop trying to tell my fiancee what to do!

LIGHTS OUT on UTIL.ACTRESS #1

JANE: (to audience) I value my fiance's opinion more and more every day. I may even dedicate this play to him. Yes, he can be moody and even shout at times. He can be very loving as well. Just one example — I told him that the hijab from the Mohammedan family next door was causing an itch on my forehead – and he was kind enough to get me a new one! (Takes it out.) It is made of Egyptian cotton and is wonderful to the touch.

HANS-AXL: For *mein kleine Kopf*-girl nussing is too *gut*!

JANE: Is not that endearing? Father Stanhope is to marry us here two weeks from today. I guess there will not be many guests after all, except for Bruiser for the hour and the Nuhranis and their little daughter. Alas, the “paparazzi” outside are still trying to get “pix” of me and Hans-Axl, but I do hope that we can have a quiet, wonderful wedding. I hope that you and those close to you are as happy as I. . . . P.S. Hans-Axl and I, of course, are saving ourselves until we are wed.

LIGHTS OUT on JANE

HANS-AXL: (to audience) That's what she thinks!

LIGHTS OUT on HANS-AXL

LIGHTS UP on JANE and HANS-AXL

JANE: The lady from next door, Mrs. Nuhrani, has been over over to visit with Hans and me upon several occasions of late. It turns out that the two of them have a great deal in common, even though Hans had thought they:



HANS-AXL: Never would have absolutely nussing to say to one another.

JANE: They share a serious disappointment in today's world and have come to believe that it is hopelessly:

HANS-AXL: Perverse, sick, *und* immoral,

MRS. NUHRANI: And worse!

JANE: Though her English is limited, Mrs. Nuhrani has been kind enough to share what awaits me in Hell if I continue on the path I am on. While dear Hans does not share the faith of the Nuhranis, he says that he wants me to listen to them about my eternal fate if I do not repent because it is almost identical to his True Catholic one. I told him that perhaps he was being rather "extreme," and he said that he was:

HANS-AXL: Not being extreme enough!

JANE: I confess that I have indeed had unseemly (and disbelieving) thoughts at times. Therefore, I can look forward to my eyeballs melting and re-growing and then melting again, day upon day, leaving me screaming in intolerable agony.

MRS. NUHRANI: Ah, the words of the Holy Koran!

JANE: Furthermore, I will feel my scalp scalded and my brains boiled, forever. For any blasphemy I may have uttered or considered uttering, I can expect unending guilt while alive, plus insults, chastisement, and rejection from those around me, and an eternity of torments after I die.

HANS-AXL: And worse!

JANE: I would love to discuss all this with my future husband, but he keeps saying there is:

HANS-AXL: Nussing to discuss.

JANE: I have expressed a somewhat opposing view about the possible benefits of the quieter, more bland Anglican Faith I was used to. Hans, backed up by Mr. and Mrs. Nuhrani, says that now I deserve even more Hellfire for questioning this Hellfire. Mrs. Nuhrani even called upon me to teach me how to keep my eyes down when the men are in the room. She has volunteered to come over –

MRS. NUHARANI: – regularly to instruct you in how to be properly submissive and dutiful.

JANE: She said that she would bring her young daughter over, and the girl and I could share lessons.

MRS. NUHARANI: As long as you do not try to teach her to read. If you both are to be a good wives, you will have to learn to submit to our respective husbands' wills.

JANE: I think, day by day, that is starting to happen. I hope you will rejoice with me as I rejoice in this new way of looking at the world. Mrs. Nuhrani likewise changed my new niqab to a newer one still – who says that I am not fashionable, to say nothing of indulged!

MRS.NUHRANI: (placing the niqab on Jane's head) Here!

JANE: The brand new one is called a chadri and covers my eyes completely, in the Pakistani border style. (I am not sure if that is where the Nuhranis are from, but they like the style.) It is wonderful how blue, if somewhat hazy, everything looks from inside my new veil. Hans says that he will let me finish my play, although it must be under his supervision, and I must show what happens to:

HANS-AXL: The fucking Homo who almost drove poor Caroline Joyce to suicide.

JANE: Thankfully, we are “on the same page” about that now. After that, he thinks it best if I give up writing and concentrate more on being a good, attentive wife to him. I think he is correct in this. It feels so liberating just to let go and let a loved (my husband) one decide. I can honestly say that I am finally beginning to appreciate my new life. I thought I was never going to be so looked after!

LIGHTS OUT on ALL

LIGHTS UP on UTIL.ACTRESS #1

UTIL.ACTRESS #1: I’m sorry. This is so wrong. The world I live in is far from perfect, but it is not *that* wrong. Nobody deserves lessons in “submission.” My God, it is some type of hideous sado-masochism incorporated into a mind-set and a cultural “value.” It is no less than apartheid for women. Pardon me for preaching, but some things simply must be Praught. Preached? Screw my bad English! Is it really all right for us to stand by and watch this happening and not intervene because it is “her decision”? Anti-religious bigotry,” my arse! Jane Austen is being destroyed by anti-human bigotry! She feels “indulged” because she gets a new and improved tent on her face! I can’t say it is none of my business. There come times when you have to believe that your righteousness is preferable, indeed superior, to somebody else’s righteousness. They have no such qualms or such niceties holding them back. Jane cannot marry that impossible man merely because he is available – and manipulating her into it! She can't!

LIGHTS OUT on UTIL.ACTRESS #1

LIGHTS UP on JANE

JANE: Father Stanhope has been kind enough to stop by several times, to provide me instruction in the Catholic faith. While much is familiar from my upbringing as an Anglican, much also is new to me. I had not fully grasped the doctrine of Papal Infallibility until these instructions. It turns out that the Pope can be wrong about geography, biology, mathematics, and chemistry, just not about matters of faith and morals. I had always thought that Catholics were claiming Papal Infallibility in everything! Learning all these new refinements in my new Christian Faith is keeping me quite busy. Also, the little five-year-old girl from next door comes over in the late

CONT'D.

mornings with her mother, the nice Muslim woman who gave me my niqab, my hijab, and my chadri. The little girl's name is Abra. I have not yet learned her mother's name, and just know her as Abra's mother or Mrs. Nuhrani. They are so sweet together, quiet, graceful. I confess that I have not had the liposuction on my double chin yet, but Hans-Axl does not complain about it as much, so maybe I won't have to "go under the knife" after all! God is merciful! Mrs. Nuhrani is teaching both Abra and me how to behave around men and to embrace their natural dominion over us. Hans loves to quote the Old Testament and Mrs. Nuhrani the Koran on this topic. I keep tending to look everybody in the eyes, and both Abra and I giggle when Hans-Axl starts to sing one of his hymns in his "musical" baritone.

HANS-AXL: *Gott* only cares for His song, not for the zinger! And you both are disrespectful sluts!

JANE: Abra and I promise every day to get better, and Mrs. Nuhrani, always patient, says that we are on our way! I have a terrible ear ache today. I can scarcely hear out of my right ear. I asked Hans to look to see what the problem might be, but he refuses, saying that I am –

HANS-AXL: A crybaby! Offer up the pain for the poor souls in Purgatory.

JANE: It is indeed good to know that what I am experiencing will not go for naught. I am sorry to say that I have not written anything more on my play, although I would like to, as I have been so occupied with the doctrinal lessons required for my conversion to the Faith of my future husband and the instructions in the Modern Strong (But Submissive) Woman from my generous neighbour. There is even a pamphlet from which she reads to me, willing to spend time with me even though her pregnancy (with the triplets) has been trying for her. She is a saint. I do miss having Bruiser, the springer spaniel, around. He used to make much of me. The "paparazzi" have apparently given up on me, and so Hans feels that it is all right for the shutters to be open fifteen minutes more in the morning now, to catch the sunlight from seven to seven forty-five. We also have hymns then. I had not fully appreciated just how many Catholic hymns there are. The Nuhranis, of course, cannot listen to any music, so coordinating their visits with Hans' needs, can be quite perilous. We have agreed not to have any music at the wedding ceremony, to accommodate the Nuhranis. I can always play some music later. Naturally, I enjoy every minute of the planning and it is a great comfort to have a full and worthwhile life. Hans has not had a beer for months, nor has he "visited" the ladies in town, he assures me. He says he:

HANS-AXL: Now prays" instead of f\*\*\*\*\*g their brains out.

JANE: He is a saint, too. In fact, he is beginning to practice Power Purity, a form of self-flagellation practiced by Blessed Jerome of the Desert in the early True Church. I worry sometimes that Hans may grievously injure himself with the studded riding crop that he has had made for himself. However, he maintains that he is better able to chastise his "fleshly desires" this way and is becoming a staunch soldier in the newly formed Army of Jesus, whose motto is:

HANS-AXL: Got *Gott*?

JANE: One can only admire his discipline. I am reluctant to boast, but my fiancé has just been promoted to captain in this growing organisation. So I have my very own Captain Preuss to dote upon! Ah, military men! I realise more and more each day how like one of the heroines I used to

CONT'D.

write about I, myself, have now become. I too have found a Truly Good Man. Despite my many, many sins.

HANS-AXL: Jabber, jabber, jabber!

JANE: Abra's grandmother is coming for a visit, and Mrs. Nuhrani asked if she might attend my wedding. I would be honoured. However, for some reason, little Abra seems very upset about her grandmother's forthcoming visit from the Old Country, wherever that is exactly. When her mother stepped out of the room for a few moments, she told me that some British girls at the mosque they go to said that the grandmother was probably coming here to do the "operation." Abra is not sure what this "operation" consists of, nor am I. It might be for tonsillitis. Yet I don't think the grandmother is a doctor. I asked Abra if her tonsils hurt, and she said that she did not hurt anywhere. She is such a lively little child, when the men are not in the room. I very much would like her to be the flower-girl at the wedding. That is still being 'discussed' between her father and Hans-Axl. I even overheard them get quite heated in the hallway over the topic, each accusing the other of trying to recruit Abra for each one's Faith. I wonder, if they do agree that she can be the flower-girl, if she will be sufficiently recovered from the upcoming "operation" to have the strength to be able to throw the rose petals – it would add such a lovely touch, don't you think?

HANS-AXL: She should be Catholic! (He sings part of a Catholic hymn.)

LIGHTS OUT on JANE and HANS-AXL

LIGHTS UP on UTIL.ACTRESS #1

UTIL.ACTRESS #2: My God, she is being sucked down into a vortex of religious nuttury. The "operation" the grandmother is coming over to perform on the little girl most likely is a clitorrectomy. You may not want to hear the specifics, but turning our heads is not going to save the child from having her vaginal lips "excised" (cut off) along with the inner labia and then the opening sewed up so that she will be PURE for her marriage! Grandmothers do it 95% of the time, to girls of five or six! Jane doesn't even seem to know what she's colluding in! She's just going along with everything that's happening to her, so giddy with marriage plans and her "conversion" and finding a Truly Good Man has she become! I hate to say it, but she has become what the tabloids have been calling her all along: "Wacko" Jane Austen. I don't think Miss Austen has a clue about how obnoxious she has made her woman character! Caroline Joyce, Hans-Axl, and that Mrs. Nuhrani are the *normal* people. God help humanity! We have got to do something! But can we really stop all of this?

LIGHTS OUT on ALL

LIGHTS UP on JANE, MRS. NUHRANI, and UTIL-ACTRESS #2

UTIL-ACTRESS #1: Miss Austen, may I have another word with you?

MRS.NUHRANI: Don't bother her now!

JANE: Yes, not now, not now. Despite all the hubbub around me, I found some time to write some more on my play. Only the Good Lord knows when I may be able to return to it again. But with the assistance of my ever-present Muses, the play continues! (She hands out “sides” to the actors within the play.)

LIGHTS OUT on JANE  
LIGHTS UP on HANS-AXL

HANS-AXL: I have revised some of the last part of the play. I zink is much better. Don’t you? (He hands out new “sides” to use.)

(Enter Utility Actors #1 and #2 to play the parts)

RUSSELL: Friday. Dear Caroline Joyce, I am not sorry if my note gave you pain. That was ever my intention. I am NOT heartily sorry that I troubled you with any troubles of my own. I should not have to deal with them myself without burdening you with them. I will never ask such a thing of you again, I vow, BECAUSE you are normal and I am NOT. . . . Your Friend, Russell Daniel.

HANS-AXL: He received an envelope soon thereafter with his own letter inside and these words handwritten on it:

CAROLINE: Dear Russell Daniel, I have agonized over this for . . . many minutes, and I have decided to return your letter un-opened, as it obviously is filled with HATE. . . .  
Caroline Joyce Smith.

HANS-AXL: Zo I think I go with this version instead, yes? Is much better. . . . Jane Austen.  
(He sings part of another Catholic hymn.)

LIGHTS OUT on HANS-AXL  
LIGHTS UP on UTIL.ACTRESS #1

UTIL.-ACTRESS #1: Now they're *re-writing* Jane Austen’s work! They have completely changed it. The phrasing is not even hers. What do you think? If this is not the last straw, I don’t know what is. Miss Austen has become a slave and a puppet, for those who want to use her for their own “moral” purposes, any way they can. We not only have to save Miss Austen; we have to save her play!

LIGHTS OUT on UTIL-ACTRESS #1  
LIGHTS UP on JANE

(Enter Utility Actresses #1 and #2.)

UTIL.-ACTRESS #2: Is this a good time to talk, Miss Austen?

JANE: Well, I am preparing the wedding invitations.

UTIL.-ACTRESS #1: Please!

JANE: I suppose I can't resist you both. But perhaps I should summon Hans-Axl to be here too. Or Mrs. Nuhrani? (Looks off for them.)

UTIL.-ACTRESS # 1: We must speak to you alone. We are worried about you.

JANE: Me? Whatever for?

UTIL.-ACTRESS #2: It may not be our place to tell you this, but we think you are not seeing things clearly right now – and not just because your face and head are covered with cloth! I'm sorry, but we have come to the conclusion that you need an “intervention.”

JANE: You can't be serious.

UTIL.-ACTRESS #1: We are. We think Hans-Axl is a terrible mate for you. I am not sure that even spelling out his many flaws will be effective: his temper, his moodiness, his occasional neglect, his rudeness, his forcing you to convert from Anglicanism to an extreme form of right-wing Catholicism, his allowing the woman from next door to push you back to the 7th century because your subjugation fits right in with his needs and plans, his obvious interest in permanent British citizenship and your estate, the closed bedroom shutters, the constant hymns, and God knows what else!

UTIL.-ACTRESS #2: Do you know that the “Captain” is also re-writing your play?

JANE: He is not! How could he? He barely speaks English.

UTIL.-ACTRESS #2: That's never stopped anybody, let alone Hans-Axl!

JANE: Have you had your say? I've had my fill of listening!

UTIL.-ACTRESS #2: You seem unable to defend anything about yourself, including your work. I wonder if the police or some other elder abuse authorities might get involved with us. Maybe we should try them first?

JANE: Something tells me they would be reluctant to interfere in Holy Matrimony, however much you disapprove of my marriage, as long as it is approved by several religious entities, from the Catholic Church to the United Imams of the United Kingdom, or whatever it is called. Maybe there is some law in England about marrying an unfrozen person. I doubt it, though! Bloody hell! What nerve!

LIGHTS OUT on ALL  
LIGHTS UP on UTILITY ACTRESS #1

UTIL.-ACTRESS #1: I may have gotten in over my head. I am torn about whether to inform the police about any part of this. I don't trust the police, I have to say, from my experience with them.

LIGHTS OUT on UTIL-ACTRESS #1

RUSSELL: (to audience) Dear Miss Austen, may I ask what prompted you to alter the second letter that Russell Daniel writes to Caroline Joyce so drastically? It makes him seem like a totally *different* and irrational person. Is there any chance you might keep the first version that you wrote?

LIGHTS OUT RUSSELL  
LIGHTS UP on HANS-AXL

HANS-AXL: (yelling) MISS AUSTEN VILL! NOT CARE TO ANSWER YOU! SHE LIKE LAST VERSION BEST. DON'T TELL HER WHAT TO WRITE. WE NEED TO SING HYMNS AND SAY PRAYERS NOW! WE VILL PRAY FOR YOU! GET LOST!  
(Sings part of a Catholic hymn.)

LIGHTS OUT on HANS-AXL  
LIGHTS UP on UTILITY ACTRESSES #1 and #2

UTIL.ACTRESS #2: Maybe you and I will simply have to "crash" the wedding and carry off the bride. Somehow it seems to fit with all the other daft things going on around us!

UTIL.ACTRESS #1: Have you seen Jane lately?

UTIL.ACTRESS #2: No. But I think she's in her room.

UTIL.-ACTRESS #1: Probably ordered by that bastard to stay in there.

UTIL-ACTRESS #2: And away from us!

UTIL-ACTRESS #1: I've been thinking about this. I think maybe a little less "intervention" and maybe a little more "acting" on our part.

UTIL.-ACTRESS #2: Oh?

(Utility Actress #1 cups her hand to whisper secretly to Utility Actress #2.)

LIGHTS OUT on BOTH  
LIGHTS UP on UTILITY ACTRESS #1 and HANS-AXL

UTIL.-ACTRESS #1: Captain Hans-Axl, I am sorry that you seemed upset with me in recent days. Believe me, I am just trying to play the parts in Miss Austen's play, nothing more. If Miss Austen wants to marry you, I must accept her decision. It is her life and her marriage, not mine. I just want to say: my best to both of you!

HANS-AXL: Ha! I guess you have learnt to accept what you cannot change. Things are just fine here, with a wedding rehearsal today. Mr. *und* Mrs. Nuhrani *und* little daughter came over to practise being witness. Mr. Nuhrani has agreed to be other witness. Abra will throw the rosey petals from the basket. Nobody else. Jane is so happy she cry all day. Can't wait for the wedding night with *mein libeling!*

LIGHTS OUT on BOTH

LIGHTS UP on UTILITY ACTRESSES #1 and #2

UTIL.-ACTRESS #1: I almost bit my lip off, but I lied to him and said I wished him well on his marriage. He couldn't wait to brag about his "wedding night." The mind boggles! I am sure they must have wildly different ideas in their heads!

UTIL.-ACTRESS #2: What a pig "Captain" Hans-Axl is! His wedding night *mit* Jane Austen, my unroyal arse! I bet he plans to sell photographs to the paparazzi!

UTIL.-ACTRESS #1: I doubt that Jane is crying that much because of happiness! What a bastard! Maybe when all is said and done he's going to have to . . .

UTIL.-ACTRESS #2: Die?

LIGHTS OUT on BOTH

LIGHTS UP on JANE and MRS. NUHARANI

JANE: (to audience) Dear Friends, it is Jane here. Captain Hans-Axl has agreed to let me out of my room again. He is off running some errands in the village, but Mrs. Nuhrani from next door is here with me. She has promised to report to Hans-Axl anything that he would find fault with. I am so fortunate to have two dutiful guardians looking out for me.

MRS. NUHARANI: Indeed!

JANE: The Captain tells me that everyone has accepted our marriage at last. That is indeed good to hear. I want others to be happy for me. I am likewise close to the completion of my play. I do hope I will be able to finish it. You see, Hans-Axl thinks it best that I forego such vain fripperies as playwriting from now on – instead to type recipes and menus for our dinners, maybe a note to a friend, or a prayer, or some hymn lyrics. There is even talk of my working on the Captain's translation into Swiss German of the complete works of St. Jerome of the Desert. It's out of my hands. I have learned much more Christian forbearance since I became engaged. Mrs. Nuhrani has likewise proven a God-send in helping me realise that –

MRS. NUHARANI: – the will of God always trumps our poor, petty desires.

JANE: Even mine in wishing to finish my play. Her mother, from somewhere abroad, was here earlier today, a handsome woman (I think), who wears a blue face veil very similar to mine. She, of course, wears the complete jilbab, which is almost slimming. She must be about sixty with white hair and rather prominent eyes. I upset her a bit by mentioning that she looked "tired" because I believed I spotted bags under her eyes, but she said that she always has bags under



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eyes. Naturally, I apologised profusely. She told the most wonderful joke:

MRS.NUHRANI: That if you were a daughter of hers and said such a thing she would have you beaten with a rod! Hilarious!

JANE: Mrs. N's mother has been talking with Abra, it turns out. Some sort of "ceremony" is being planned for the girl. I am unclear if it is to take place before or after my wedding. There seems to be some concern about whether Abra will be able to participate in her grandmother's "ceremony" and then have enough strength to throw the roses at my "ceremony." Such a cornucopia of ceremonies we are having around here! Oddly, the little girl still will not stay alone with her grandmother.

MRS.NUHRANI: But she will!

JANE: She has been coming over to Austen House more and more, even by herself. Abra is a darling, sweet-faced little child, just five. She loves to stay close to me when her mother and I are using the computer. She seems fascinated by all the "icons" on the desktop. I believe their religion forbids "icons," but they surely must make an exception for the desktop ones?

MRS.NUHRANI: *What?!*

LIGHTS OUT on JANE and MRS. NUHRANI

LIGHTS UP on JANE and MRS. NUHRANI

JANE: Apparently Mrs. N had no idea what her child was looking at it when her mother was not around. Now she wants to know exactly what her daughter has been looking at.

MRS. NUHRANI: Of course! I must protect my poor child from your corrupt British ways!

JANE: Abra wants to show her mummy something she watched on the computer that is "very funny."

LIGHTS OUT on JANE and MRS. NUHRANI

LIGHTS UP on JANE and HANS-AXL

JANE: Things are rather in a roil here. Mrs. Nuhrani and her daughter are gone home now. She felt very discomfited. What Abra wanted to show her mummy was something she evidently discovered by clicking on one of Captain Hans's icons on our computer. It is labeled HOLY STUFF and contains videos and pictures of various individuals and groups engaged in very graphic postures. Mrs. N screamed that it was "pornography" that was going to "ruin my poor, innocent daughter for life!" Captain Hans insists that –

HANS-AXL: It is religious and spiritual inspiration for how to lead zee perfect life here on earth by fighting off fleshly temptations. *Jawohl!*

JANE: I have asked to see these images for myself; however, my fiancé thinks it better that I not view them. I suppose he knows best. Mrs. N swears that she saw at least one exposed penis. Captain Hans maintains that it –

HANS-AXL: – is not penis but arrow protruding from St. Sebastian. *Jawohl!*

JANE: Whatever the postures of these people might be, the child does not seem so much frightened of them as besides herself with mirth. I have never heard her so amused in all the time I have known her. “Adults are so silly!” she kept saying. Anyway, Mrs. N is now threatening to turn Hans in for “child pornography,” in this case, for pornography made available to a child. The Captain says –

HANS-AXL: The girl should never have clicked on a private icon she had no right to click on, besides the fact that the images are “holy” and downright good for people to see, including small children.

JANE: I do not know what to think. Do you suppose a child can be scarred for life by seeing an exposed penis? How many penises would it take? I know that depictions of Christian martyrs can be inspirational, but can a penis ever be holy? Maybe there is a tinge of hysteria over this turn of events, on top of everything else, with everybody incensed and outraged and shouting at everybody else, sometimes even those on the same side. The relatives are keeping the little girl back home for now. Frankly, if she runs back here, I do not know whether to send her back to those relatives or not.. Should the Captain and I keep the child here according to her wishes but against theirs?

LIGHTS OUT on JANE and HANS-AXL

LIGHTS UP on UTILITY ACTOR #1 peeping into the room, trying to get a photograph.

LIGHTS UP on JANE

JANE: Shoo!

(The man disappears.)

JANE: The “paparazzi” (just one person part time now) have heard the commotion around here and have begun to snoop around Austen House once again. We are not sure about our wedding, but we remain hopeful. It’s quite mad here. Abra keeps running away from her relatives and coming over, crying that her grandmother has a *razor* and wants to cut her! The relatives don’t want her to be in Austen House because they keep shouting that Captain Hans has “perverted” their little girl with “child porn” and now she is “addicted” to it and cannot keep away from it. The Captain has vigorously defended the little girl as:

LIGHTS UP on HANS-AXL with a riding crop

HANS-AXL: Deeply religious at early age. And leaning toward the Truth Faith, and in fact is in need of *more* such holy images to save her soul from damnation!

JANE: The Mohammedans, on the other hand, are threatening to break our computer and its “evil, tempting icons.” It has gotten quite ugly, with animosity about Islamic beliefs versus Catholic ones!

HANS-AXL: We stop now. I need to fast and pray and chastise my sinful body *mit* its sinful desires!

(He flicks his riding crop.)

LIGHTS OUT on JANE and HANS-AXL  
LIGHTS UP on UTILITY ACTRESSES #1 and #2

UTIL.-ACTRESS #1 : Have you heard anymore? About the wedding? About the play?

UTIL.-ACTRESS #2: No! Have you?

UTIL.-ACTRESS #1: I feel so stymied!

UTIL.-ACTRESS #2: Maybe we should just leave. It was just supposed to be an acting gig. Not all this.

UTIL.-ACTRESS #1: I'm tempted. But it would be criminal neglect on all our parts if we did not do everything in our power to save the woman and her play, if they can be saved at all! And there's the little girl from next door too! Something very strange is going on there.

UTIL.-ACTRESS #2: I think you're right. But what?

JANE: (offstage) Help! Help, somebody!

LIGHTS OUT on UTILITY ACTRESSES  
LIGHTS UP on HANS-AXL with his riding crop

HANS-AXL: Do not stick your noses where they not belong! (Shakes the riding crop.)

(Enter the UTILITY ACTRESSES, both with brooms.)

HANS-AXL: Vhat you doing in here?

UTIL.-ACTRESS # 1: We heard Miss Austen call for help.

HANS-AXL: Oh, yeah? You heard a sinner asking forgiveness from Gott! That's what you hear!

JANE: (offstage) Is anybody out there?

UTIL.ACTRESS #2: Miss Austen, do you need help?

JANE: I think perhaps I do.

UTIL.ACTRESS #1: Don't worry! We'll help you. (Waves her broom.)

HANS-AXL: You just try!

UTIL.ACTRESS #2: Let her go!

HANS-AXL: What's this? The Peasants' Revolt?

UTIL.ACTRESS #1: No, the Feminist Jihad!

(The two actresses advance on Hans-Axl with their brooms. He advances on them with his riding crop.)

LIGHTS OUT on ALL

LIGHTS UP on UTILITY ACTRESSES and JANE

UTIL.ACTRESS #1: I suppose you're wondering what happened. We'll get to that.

UTIL.ACTRESS #2: Jane wants to tell us all exactly what has happened. We hope that you won't spread this around outside this room. We believe it is not pretty. Still, you deserve to know the full story. I know we can count on your discretion, and Miss Austen believes so too.

JANE: Do I?

(Enter HANS-AXL to re-play the part. JANE reluctantly joins him.)

UTIL.ACTRESS #2: Jane says the night before the wedding she and the Captain had opened a bottle of French champagne. Unfortunately, the cork hit Jane in the eye because Hans-Axl was not experienced in opening wine bottles, just lager bottles. It stung, and she asked him to apologise, surprised that he had not done so on his own. He told her –

HANS-AXL: You shoulda ducked.

UTIL.ACTRESS #1: She thought that was rather thoughtless on his part. It made her begin to wonder what kind of a marriage she was getting into. If her fiancé was so careless and insensitive, what would he be as an actual husband? With more champagne (her third glass, his fourth), Jane said she began to mention some other things that had been troubling her, just underneath the surface, things that she had pushed to the side because –

JANE: I so much wanted to be a wife.

UTIL.ACTRESS #2: Jane continued with –

JANE: I asked Hans if he had stolen money from me.

UTIL.ACTRESS #2: His reply was –

HANS-AXL: *Ja*, but what you do about it now, huh, *lieblich*?!

UTIL.ACTRESS #1: She asked him if he still went with the 'ladies' in town.

HANS-AXL: Only when I want to. What you do about that, huh, *lieblich*?

UTIL.ACTRESS #2: She asked him if he had re-written some of her new play and changed the character to reflect his opinions rather than hers. His reply:

HANS-AXL: *Ja*, I done so, but it don't matter 'cause now I am going to kill the whole bloody play! And vhat you do about that, too, huh, *mein libeling*?

UTIL.ACTRESS #2: With that, Hans-Axl, quite pissed on champagne, raced to the computer and –

JANE: No!

UTIL.ACTRESS #2: He did what?! You are not serious!

JANE: He pulled me over to the computer screen and pointed to where the play manuscript was in the Recycle Bin. “Wait!” I cried. “That’s my only copy.”

HANS-AXL: Is that so, *mein lieblich*?

JANE: And then he took his index finger and pressed hard on Empty the Contents, laughing the entire time. There are no rough drafts, because all the revisions were made on the computer. (to Utility Actresses) By any chance did you save the sides of the play that you were using?

UTIL.ACTRESS #2: I have to admit that I have saved nothing. I fully expected to be handed new sides with revisions, as had been the case all along.

UTILACTRESS #1: I did as well. All of us actors did. So that is the end of her play! No end?

JANE: I would like to say that was the end of the bad news, but it is not. (Lifts her veil, showing bruises on her face.)

UTIL.ACTRESS #1: He didn't!

JANE: Hans-Axl had also been fasting and chastising his flesh, so he was a bit more light-headed than usual last night. He said that he had been having a very ‘torturous’ time controlling his ‘carnal desires.’ He said that St. Paul was so very right, that it is better to marry than to burn, even if you are not in love.

LIGHTS OUT on ALL  
LIGHTS UP on HANS-AXL alone

HANS-AXL: I burn with a loathsome lust every second of every day! I have waited this long, but last night I could vait no more! I cried: “*Tonight* we vill have the honeymoon!”

LIGHTS OUT on HANS-AXL  
LIGHTS UP on JANE, THE UTILITY ACTRESSES and HANS-AXL

JANE: His words that hurt the most were:

HANS-AXL: Even if you are not in love!

JANE: And then . . . and then . . . I can't.

UTIL.ACTRESS #1: I will tell it. It must be told! Maybe I have your permission, Miss Austen, to reveal what you told us in your bedroom?

JANE: (hesitates, then reluctantly agrees) Yes.

UTIL.ACTRESS #1: And then Hans unzipped himself, lifted Miss Austen's face veil, took her head in his hands without asking, held her by the earlobes, and thrust his "chull" into her mouth, repeatedly, crying out "certain filthy words," until he ejaculated. All rather hurriedly. None of the words, says Miss Austen, were –

JANE: *Mein lieblich.*

UTIL.ACTRESS #2: Jane has admitted that she had been unclear on what married people actually do after marriage. Wasn't it supposed to be the man caressing the woman's cheek, her chin, her forehead, gazing sweetly into her eyes and telling her how much he cared for her? She thought, at worst, that it might involve Hans-Axl and her in prolonged kisses, even some "wet, deep" ones.

UTIL.ACTRESS #1: Possibly even Hans-Axl "touching" himself during the kissing. But nothing like what she was experiencing had crossed her mind before.

JANE: My God, what did you just do to me?

LIGHTS UP on HANS-AXL

HANS-AXL: What you think it was, honey? I give you a big, juicy one, *ja*?

JANE: I did not feel any love coming from you!

UTIL.ACTRESS #2: Jane protested.

HANS-AXL: Would Hans bonk your face if I didn't love you?

JANE: It was not a delight for me, in no way whatsoever.

HANS-AXL: And, boy, was you terrible at it.

JANE: What?!

UTIL.ACTRESS #2: And then he smoked a cigarette. And then did it to her a second time, taking longer, the names called more filthy, the activity more violent this time, yelling. I don't think I can even say it.

LIGHTS OUT on ALL

HANS-AXL: (in the dark) I am fucking Jane Austen's mouth! I am fucking Jane Austen's mouth!

JANE: (in the dark) That's when I understood what my future married life was going to be like.

LIGHTS UP on HANS-AXL, JANE, and the UTILITY ACTRESSES

HANS-AXL: Your head still terrible, too many teeth, but a little better this time. We work it out over time.

UTIL.ACTRESS #2: And then he sat on the sofa and smoked a *second* cigarette.

JANE: I have something to say, I told him.

HANS-AXL: In a minute. Let me relax. That took a lot out of me.

JANE: Hans, our wedding is off!

UTIL.ACTRESS #1: They argued for a long time after that, and much was said about false expectations in marriage. Miss Austen said that although the experience had been unexpected and shattering, it had –

JANE: Knocked some common sense back into my head.

UTIL.ACTRESS #2: Even when Hans- Axl began to beg for forgiveness and beseeched her to proceed with their wedding, Miss Austen was adamant that no such ceremony was going to take place between the two of them.

JANE: Ever.

UTIL.ACTRESS #1: Jane's awakening combined with a post-coital intense surge of guilt and dismay from Hans-Axl – guilt because he and Jane were not yet legally wed when the sex took place, and dismay because he had completely spoiled any wedding before it could take place, Hans-Axl ran screaming from the room.

(Hans-Axl runs screaming from the stage. We hear but don't see the following sequence.)

UTIL.ACTRESS #1: He raced to his own room, got the riding crop that he had been using for some time to quell his sexual yearnings, or possibly to enhance them (I am not entirely clear on this point), and gave his naked, raw back and even his genital area a sound thrashing. Then he thrashed his forehead and temples until he finally succumbed to his own painful bashing and fell to the floor bleeding and in full body shock. As I speak, he lies in his religiously induced coma in his room.

JANE: I believe, alas, that you are correct.

UTIL.ACTRESS #1: I am afraid I could not refrain from telling Miss Austen, “Better a lesson learned before marriage than after.”

JANE: That, too.

UTIL.ACTRESS #2: The paparazzo fellow, Nigel, managed to get him off the floor, where he had lain all night, and onto a divan. The paparazzo fellow came because he heard Miss Austen this morning calling for *anyone*, finally even for the paparazzi, to come. She had hoped that –

JANE: – the Nuhranis would relent and come to help, but they are angry and did not.

(Enter Nigel.)

NIGEL: That guy is resting, if being a permanent coma is resting.

UTIL.ACTRESS #1: This Nigel did not hear Miss Austen calling until just before we rushed to help her.

NIGEL: Okay, okay, I get it. You want the credit. Now what's next? No ambulance has been called, or the police either. Do you want me to do it?

(Everybody looks at Jane.)

JANE: I suppose we will have to call an ambulance . . . eventually.

NIGEL: So that is where things stand as of this moment, dead serious and yet dead hilarious. Or is that just me?

(Jane beckons the two Utility Actresses to her.)

ACTRESSES #1 AND 2: Yes, Miss Austen?

JANE: Would you loosen these a bit. Just loosen.

(She means the coverings on her face and head.)

ACTRESSES #1 AND #2: Of course.

JANE: I'll do the rest.

(Jane removes the veil, the head covering and tosses them away.)

JANE: Put them away, with everything else that is “old” and “borrowed” and “blue.”

LIGHTS OUT on ALL



LIGHTS UP on JANE

JANE: My dear friends, I am sorry that you had to experience all this. You came hoping to see a lovely Jane Austen play, and this is what you got, all this unseemly drama – and not even a complete play. Please excuse a foolish old woman for promising what she could not deliver. Would you turn out the lights, please?

LIGHTS OUT on JANE

LIGHTS UP on UTILITY ACTRESSES

UTIL.ACTRESS #2: But what happened to the little girl next door? Did her relatives really perform that horrible operation on her?

LIGHTS UP on JANE

JANE: Once I learned the truth, I am happy to let you know that I reported the planned genital “cutting” of the five-year-old girl, Abra, to the police, and they took it very seriously and stopped it before it could be completed by the grandmother. The family says it wants to return to its home country if it cannot “practice our customs” here. That is fine with me.

UTIL.ACTRESS #2: Thank Heavens for that!

JANE: The dilemma with the little girl now is that she has nobody here to see after her. I have offered to adopt her; however, her parents say no. Abra may be in this limbo for years. For now, I am paying for the girl to stay in a boarding school for sexual victims. Income remains a major source of worry. Do not worry! We are not going to take up a collection in the audience. I had counted on my play, but it will be difficult for me to complete it without starting over entirely from scratch, and I am not sure that I have the energy, or the time left, for that. My past royalties from my novels are still up in the air. So any films, reality series, e-books, books on tape, or even Jane Austen videos games (God help me!) made from my labours will decidedly have to wait, perhaps forever.

(Enter Nigel.)

NIGEL: But!

JANE: I have contracted with the member of the “paparazzi” who heard my calls for assistance when Hans-Axl went into his coma. (He is still in that coma, by the way, in Queens Hospice for Paupers. The prognosis is not good. It seems that his religious zeal and guilt have rendered him a virtual vegetable, and the likelihood of recovery is slim. It is perhaps just as well since the charges of “child pornography” against him might very well have stuck in a court of law. I will pray for him when I attend service next Sunday at St. Clothilda’s. No, he was not a good man, and no, he was not a good choice for a marriage, but, such as it was, I did love him for a time. As such, I will be contributing a monthly sum for as long as he lives in his current state. The need for income, always an annoyance, is nevertheless something one must attend to, willy-nilly, in particular as one’s expenses increase. I have, therefore, contracted with Nigel’s tabloid:

NIGEL: *The Sun on Sunday* for a “package” to be called AUSTEN HOUSE EXPOSE.

JANE: It is not to be helped, it would seem. I have agreed to have a reporter write up the –

NIGEL: – pre-marital “Sex-Capades” of the Captain and herself that took place that night, and also to allow photos and re-creations of that as well as Hans-Axl in the coma in the Paupers’ Hospice, and, to ‘sweeten’ the deal, after considerable prompting from the other side, to throw in a series of personal letters of Janie’s to be published, perhaps with updated illustrations from her novels, which I haven’t read.

UTIL.-ACTRESS #1: My god! You mean as titillations?!

JANE: My dear, one must not flinch from the distasteful when money is no longer there. In exchange for not running a series of exposes about me and my possible connection to Hans-Axl’s Child Porn Ring (utterly ridiculous, of course), I have agreed to reveal a series of three letters that I once wrote to my dear sister, Cassandra. These letters no longer exist. I am sure that she destroyed them upon my “death,” if not before. We never spoke of them, not once, but I know that she received them, and I know that she treasured them. Although the letters are no longer extant, trust me they are emblazoned in my brain, just as when I first wrote them many years ago in my twenties. *The Sun on Sunday* is not run by fools, and naturally I had to have a DNA test, as it is called. It matches that of my proven deceased relatives. I am who I say I am –

NIGEL: – Miss Janie Austen.

JANE: The one positive in all this is that they are paying me a great deal of money for these revelations. If life gives one lemons, I suppose one must make lemonade, even if it is unsweetened. So, besides whatever you and my other friends did, I owe more than I may care to admit to –

NIGEL: – The gutter press, who heard her cries for help, both physically and financially.

JANE: Life is always surprising, I suppose, no matter how much one plans against it!

NIGEL: You ready to dictate that first letter? (He takes out a recording device.)

JANE: The letter itself of course no longer exists. But, believe me, I recall every syllable of it. (Takes a breath) Shall we? . . .

Wednesday, February 27, 1799. My Darling, Delicious Cassandra, I cannot, alas, hold back my feelings for your another year, no, not another second longer. I think you have seen it in my eyes maybe more than you care to acknowledge. I have seen you turn away from my gaze even when I knew that I should not look at you with such emotions, such feelings, and yet I could not do so. But such emotions I do indeed feel for you – You are so beautiful, so good, so accomplished, and so unrewarded for all your fineness. The world is not fair! If it were fair, it would shout your name and seek your company constantly, just as I do. Except that I must shout it inside my head, inside my desolate heart. Yet I feel possessed today and must tell you that I love you, not just as a sister, of which the very best you are, hands down, but as I would love a *man*. I would go so far as to say that this love may go further than the love of any man I have ever known. I want to bury my face in your bosom. I want to kiss & nibble at your breasts, breasts that only I have seen in all their naked loveliness. If you would let me, I would even place my lips upon

CONT'D.

that region that you keep so fastidious. I cannot tell you of the nights I have lain awake with longing in my loins for one kind look from you, for one half-kiss upon my nether lip as we strolled across Home Meadow on our morning walk. I have no hope that you return my love, or my desires, but mine are grown so swollen that I can no longer contain them, yet I will never be happy until I place my finger, my hand, my very tongue upon your lovely mound. I lie here now with a locket containing a lock of your precious hair within, keeping it between the loving warmth of my thighs. . . . Adoringly, Your Jane.

LIGHTS OUT on ALL

LIGHTS UP on UTILITY ACTRESSES

UTIL.ACTRESS #2: Who knew that lesbian incest would be so profitable!

UTIL.ACTRESS #1: She's quite right to sell this "package" rather than get saddled with those Child Porn accusations. Those do not "play" nearly as well.

LIGHTS UP on JANE

JANE: I hope that I have not lost your friendship over this. I owe so much to both of you.

UTIL.ACTRESS #2: You don't have to worry about losing my friendship over any of this. In fact, you had me at "My Darling, Delicious Cassandra."

UTIL.-ACTRESS #1: I'm just sorry that it took scandals to get you out of debt. It was thus you, ultimately, who saved yourself. So Bless You, your once and future friend.

(The three women hug.)

LIGHTS OUT on ALL

LIGHTS UP on JANE

JANE: You're still here?! Wonderful! I have received the money for my "package," and the first of the Austen House Expose appeared this morning. The telephone, naturally has begun to ring off the hook, with even more "callers" at the front step, uninvited, needless to say! Not all of them were friendly, I'm sorry to say. Unlike you!

LIGHTS OUT on JANE

LIGHTS UP on JANE

JANE: Yes, there's more! You will hardly believe my good fortune! I have been unpacking the cardboard boxes that I managed to carry away with me when I left Swizzerland and moved back to England. Guess what I discovered?! I discovered a complete set of all the nineteenth-century works of Jane Austen, including juvenilia and her unfinished novels, all in their original handwritten manuscripts and autographed by the author. I did not fully understand the market for your materials, dear Jane, but so far as I know there is only one other surviving original manuscript of your work and No Autographed Copies at All. I would estimate the value of my "find" at several million – and I mean in *pounds*! It appears that you are not only rich, but

impossibly rich! (Yes. you are 236 – but you can't have everything, and you certainly can't look a gift horse in the mouth!

LIGHTS OUT on JANE

LIGHTS UP on JANE

JANE: We are making plans to terminate the lease here at Austen House in a few weeks' time and pay the Peacocks in full. It is amazing how large sums of money in one's bank account can take the edge off one's anxieties. *The Sun on Sunday* is already asking for more "hot incestuous lesbian love letters," with "more details" this time. As I told the editor, "All in the ripeness of time." There is talk of a movie. Forgive my vanity! I will purchase a house of my own, and I will have rooms for all of you to come and stay with me, at times. I have already looked at several homes, and there is one in particular that is just about to come on the market. It is presently owned by The Earl of P\_\_\_\_\_, who wishes to sell because his family has grown up, his wife passed on, and he has taken a flat in York. I have so far taken a tour inside this house, I am pleased to say, and its twenty-two rooms and seven baths are in excellent repair. There is even a tennis court in the back, although I do not play anymore. The new *estate*, for indeed it truly must be called one, has extensive grounds, including a fell, several downs, a meadow, two gardens (an English and a Japanese one), a pond for the swans, and splendid views of Lake Ullswater an eighth of a mile away. To say more would be to boast. Yet I would say, all things considered, that I shall have a view of a lake at last! Bruiser, the dog, will love it. I have not seen him much for weeks. (Enter Utility Actor #1 to play the dog.) But he was up to see me today. Good boy that he is, he "made much of me." He has agreed to come live with me there, and the Peacocks concur. I have likewise begun negotiations with the far neighbours who actually own Bouncer, the chestnut horse that I so much enjoyed watching from my bedroom window. Both he and his "lady friend," the filly, are going to move to the new estate with me. (Enter Utility Actor #2 to play the horse.) I have finally been down to the garden that backs onto the lower pasture and have, under an apple tree, stroked Bouncer on his forelock and ears and even nuzzled my cheek against his long face for a few moments. He seemed to enjoy it. I know that I certainly did. Such a majestic animal! There is plenty of room to run at the new place – shall I call it New Place? A fine house to live in, a fine horse in one's pasture, a good dog by one's side, a new novel to begin – yes, I have an idea for one – and a bad man in a coma – what more does one need to be happy? . . . Don't you think? I think.

BLACKOUT  
END of PLAY