

THE COMPLETE NOVELS OF JANE AUSTEN: NOW NEW AND IMPROVED!

A short comedy by
Hillary DePiano

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

JANE AUSTEN, Regency era English author.

HENRY AUSTEN, Jane's brother and agent.

GEORGE KNIGHTLEY, co-producer of Emma's *The Matchmaker* reality show.

EMMA WOODHOUSE, co-producer and host of *The Matchmaker*.

HARRIET, bachelorette on *The Matchmaker*.

MR. ELTON, vicar, suitor on *The Matchmaker*.

FRANK CHURCHILL, young man, suitor on *The Matchmaker*.

KEN, sportscaster.

RED, sportscaster.

ANNOUNCER, soap opera style announcer.

CAPT. FREDERICK WENTWORTH, Navy Captain from *Persuasion*.

DR. ANNE ELLIOT, Wentworth's ex-finance.

LOUISA MUSGROVE, head trauma patient of Dr. Elliot's, former love interest of Wentworth's.

CATHERINE MORLAND, The Chosen One from the dystopian thriller *North Hanger Lab B*.

HENRY TILNEY, Catherine's love interest.

ELINOR DASHWOOD, older, sensible sister from *Sense and Sensibility*.

MARIANNE DASHWOOD, Elinor's younger, impulsive sister.

ELIZABETH BENNET, werewolf, heroine of *Pride and Prejudice*.

FITZWILLIAM DARCY, vampire, in love with Elizabeth.

LYDIA BENNET, Elizabeth's younger sister, femme fatale.

WICKHAM, horror movie villain.

MANSFIELD PARK ATHLETES

ZOMBIES

PRODUCTION NOTES

This super flexible play can be as small or large as you need it to be. It can be performed with as few as three performers to play all parts with simple sets and costumes suggested by a few elements here and there, or you can cast every part. There are also opportunities to add more of an ensemble if desired in *Emma*, *Manchester Park*, *Northanger Abbey*, and *Sense and Sensibility*. Improvising and updating with modern references within the novel scenes is welcome and encouraged.

Any role can be played by a performer of any race or gender.

SCENE 1

(Henry Austen's office in the afterlife.)

(JANE AUSTEN enters. While she is her proper historical English self, her brother HENRY is in all ways a modern Hollywood agent.)

JANE: You wanted to see me?

HENRY: Jane Austen! Look at you! You're beautiful, babe! Beautiful!

JANE: Henry, whatever has gotten into you?

HENRY: Nothing! I may be dead but I'm still your agent, same as always.

JANE: But what are you wearing? And what's happened to your accent?

HENRY: I needed a change. You can't dwell on the past, babe. It's all about the now.

JANE: I'm your sister, Henry. Persist in calling me "babe" and I will box your ears. Now, what is this all about? I was enjoying the hereafter much more when I was left to rest in peace.

HENRY: It's about revitalizing The Brand, ba—uh, sis. You know, Jane Austen™. Synergy.

JANE: I haven't the slightest idea of what you're talking about.

HENRY: You know I love your stuff and your novels were great for their time. But the living today, they don't do old. Too much thinking, not enough zing. We've got to redo the whole batch, make them go viral.

JANE: I already went viral back in 1817. It's why I find myself here in the afterlife listening to your inane chatter.

HENRY: No. You're not getting me. I'm talking about *The Complete Novels of Jane Austen: Now New and Improved!* We gotta scratch the niche and take these babies mainstream!

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Sense and Selfie Ability! Northanger App-y! Emma-ji! You know, like Emma and emoji... I'm just spit-balling here.

JANE: Not this again! You already tampered with two of my novels after I died. Can't you leave the rest alone?

HENRY: That was a few line edits, a title change. Small stuff. I'm talking about redoing the whole canon. Rewrite them at the source, right there in your beautiful brain, so it updates every copy of the stuffy originals all over the world with something fresh enough for the smart phone generation.

JANE: Change the original novels? I don't know.

HENRY: Sure! It's like you always say, "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a classic of any popularity must be in want of a reboot!"

JANE: I'm quite confident that I have never said those words in my life.

HENRY: I thought you might take some convincing so I prepared a little presentation to show you how great this could be for us. When you see how easy your stuff adapts to what the living like these days, you're going to be on board, I'm sure of it.

JANE: Hmm. We'll see.

HENRY: Let's start off by getting real with a little reality! Bring on *Emma*.

SCENE 2

(The set of a reality dating show, The Matchmaker. Think live finale of "The Bachelor" or similar with audience. The producer, MR. KNIGHTLEY, rushes around getting everything ready. HARRIET stands opposite the bachelors, who include MR. ELTON and FRANK CHURCHILL, holding a single rose.)

MR. KNIGHTLEY: Alright, people, we're live with the final Match Ceremony in 3...2...1... Everyone give it up for the host

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of *The Matchmaker*, Emma Woodhouse!

(Audience goes nuts as EMMA comes out.)

EMMA: Thank you! Thank you!

HARRIET: Gosh, this is so exciting! To marry a man above my station! And to think, before I met you, Emma, I was going to just marry that farmer.

EMMA: Well, I am the best matchmaker ever.

(Dramatic music.)

Now, Harriet, this is the moment of truth. It's time to decide which of these gentlemen will get your final rose. Will it be Mr. Elton—

MR. ELTON: I'd rather marry you, Emma!

EMMA: Ew. No.

HARRIET: I wasn't really interested in Mr. Elton anyway.

EMMA: Good. Then he gets the ravenous shark pit.

(She pulls a lever, which drops Mr. Elton into the shark pit. He screams as he plummets to his death. The crowd loves it.)

MR. ELTON: But I'm a vicar! A man of Godddddddddddddd!

EMMA: Anyway, Harriet, I think you and Frank Churchill would be just perfect for each other.

FRANK CHURCHILL: But I'm engaged to Jane Fairfax!

(Everyone gasps.)

EMMA: How did we not catch that on the background check?

MR. KNIGHTLEY: It was a secret engagement, Em. No one knew!

EMMA: That's it! Shark pit for him too!

(She yanks the lever again. Frank Churchill screams as he falls. The crowd loves it even more than last time.)

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FRANK CHURCHILL: No! Aaaaah!

EMMA: Sorry about that, Harriet.

HARRIET: It's fine. I've already made my choice. I know who I want to marry. I'm going to give my rose to...

(Super dramatic music while she holds the moment way too long.)

Mr. George Knightley!

EMMA: What? My co-producer?

(Harriet goes to give Mr. Knightley the rose but Emma slaps it out of her hand.)

No! You can't have Mr. Knightley! Because...I just realized I'm in love with him...and he's in love with me...and we're meant to be together!

MR. KNIGHTLEY: Took you long enough.

(He picks up the rose and hands it to Emma. They embrace. Crowd "awww"s.)

HARRIET: What the heck? But what about me? *(No one is paying attention to her.)* Oh, well. I guess I could go back to that farmer.

(Without breaking the embrace, Emma hits the lever again.)

No, not the shark pit!

(Harriet screams as she falls. Crowd goes nuts.)

SCENE 3

(Emma scene goes dark.)

JANE: Ugh. No. Sharks? Honestly, Henry. No matter what they call it, I don't see what any of what we just watched has to do with reality.

HENRY: Not real enough for you? Well, if it's authenticity

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you're after, you're going to love what we did up for *Mansfield Park*. Let's play ball!

SCENE 4

(KEN and RED are sportscasters doing the fast paced play-by-play of a sports game. The action they describe plays out as a bizzaro mime football-ish game with a heart pillow as a ball. Stage directions below are a suggestion of what that could look like but feel free to make it your own. You don't need as many actors as there are characters mentioned below. A couple of performers can play everyone with just a small costume element to distinguish between roles.)

KEN: Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to another beautiful day here at Mansfield Park. I think little Fanny Price is the player to watch in this game, Red.

(Players are warming up, stretching.)

RED: Gotta agree with you there, Ken. That one's a real Cinderella story, coming from nothing, drafted over here to the Park when she was just a kid.

(They line up for a kick-off.)

KEN: And she's not having an easy time of it. Lots of bruisers in this game. We've seen Norris give it to her a few times already.

(NORRIS does an "I'm watching you" gesture to FANNY. EDMUND gives Fanny a supportive clap on the back.)

RED: Yeah, but I like Fanny and Edmund out there together. What a team!

(The snap. They all go for the heart. Someone runs through them with a sign saying something like "Sir Francis owns slaves.")

KEN: Wait! What's this?

(Everyone dives out of the way to not touch the sign, causing

injuries everywhere.)

RED: Oo! Nobody wanted to touch that! Just slid right over the slave trade like it didn't even happen. Ugly!

KEN: Is someone going to throw a flag? Out of lane violation!

(The sign is gone. MARY and HENRY CRAWFORD come in from the bench.)

RED: Looks like the Crawfords are getting on the field now and, boy, are they causing a stir.

(Fanny's trying to throw Edmund the heart but Mary has him blocked.)

KEN: Would you look at that! Mary Crawford's already putting some real coverage on Edmund.

RED: Fanny's not going to like that!

(Fanny goes to throw to MARIA or JULIA but Henry Crawford has them both blocked.)

KEN: Meanwhile Henry Crawford's over there doing double duty, putting the moves on Maria and Julia at the same time!

RED: Isn't Rushworth Mary's man? Not a good idea leaving a rich prospect like him uncovered.

(RUSHWORTH intercepts the heart. Mary goes after him. Rushworth passes the heart to Henry Crawford who fakes to several of the others before heading towards Fanny.)

KEN: She's back on Rushworth now. But here comes Henry, ready to make his move on...Fanny?

RED: He's going for the fake.

(He looks like he's faking for a moment but then gets down on one knee, offers Fanny the heart pillow. She's surprised for a moment and then slaps it out of his hand.)

KEN: But no! It's real! It's a real move! He's proposing! He's proposing and she's shutting him down! What a block!

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(COACH SIR THOMAS blows the whistle, throws Fanny out of the game. While everyone's watching that, Maria betrays her team, abandons Rushworth, and steals the heart for Henry Crawford. They run off together with it.)

RED: Sir Thomas didn't like that one. Fanny's been benched. But what's this? Henry and Maria? Look at them go! Unbelievable!

KEN: That's some affair! Look at Rushworth. He doesn't even know what's happened.

(Rushworth stands clueless in the middle of the field.)

RED: Catch it on the replay, buddy.

(Someone leads the confused Rushworth offstage. The rest line up for another snap.)

KEN: Sex scandals. Erotic symbolism. Double entendre. What's gotten into Austen in this one?

RED: I don't know, Ken, but I like it.

(The team lines up. The snap. Edmund's got the heart. Mary comes for him.)

KEN: Now Mary's making her move. She's coming for Edmund.

(He throws it to Fanny, who's just come back off the bench. Everyone is in shock.)

But no! No! I can't believe it! He's gone for Fanny!

(Fanny goes all the way for the touchdown. Everyone goes nuts.)

RED: Fanny and Edmund! Fanny Price for the win! Fanny Price is the mistress of Mansfield Park!

(Even the sportscasters freak out, celebrating and hugging each other as the scene goes dark.)

SCENE 5

JANE: You want to turn my novels into some kind of...sport?

HENRY: Well, yeah! They already think you invented baseball, might as well roll with it. Besides, there's nothing with more mass appeal. People want something they can yell at over a beer and if we get a league going, the licensing and broadcasting rights alone—

JANE: Henry. Do you even hear yourself?

HENRY: OK. That's my fault. I should have started you on the scripted stuff. Next, *Persuasion*!

SCENE 6

(A hospital room.)

ANNOUNCER: Previously on *Persuasion*...

(Soap opera style medical drama. Dramatic music. Over the top acting. DR. ANNE ELLIOT attends to the unconscious LOUISA MUSGROVE in the hospital bed, while CAPTAIN WENTWORTH waits at her bedside.)

WENTWORTH: How is she?

ANNE: It's too soon to tell. The trauma to her brain is severe.

(Wentworth moves in close.)

WENTWORTH: As severe as the trauma to my heart when you left me?

(Dramatic music swells.)

ANNE: Please, Captain Wentworth. Louisa could wake up any moment and learn the truth about us!

WENTWORTH: I don't care! Let everyone know of our secret engagement all those years ago that we kept hidden even when I ran off to the Navy and you thought I was lost at sea but really I was earning my fortune which is why I'm now

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much richer than before. I must know your heart, Anne!

ANNE: You know it! But what of you, doting on Louisa?

WENTWORTH: I wasn't doting that hard. I did let her head hit the pavement.

ANNE: Oh, Frederick!

WENTWORTH: And all this time I thought you preferred Benwick and his sad poems.

ANNE: I'd have to have brain damage to choose him over you!

LOUISA: *(In her sleep:)* I like Benwick...

ANNE: See?

WENTWORTH: Kiss me, you fool!

(Music swells like mad as they embrace.)

SCENE 7

JANE: Enough.

(Persuasion goes dark.)

You know how I feel about sentimentality and you added even more of it? No. Besides, my book was called *The Elliots*. *Persuasion* is that silly title you slapped onto it after my death. Why did you do that anyway?

HENRY: You're still mad about that, huh?

JANE: And then you changed *Catherine* to *Northanger Abbey*... It's almost as if you were under some misguided impression that you knew my books better than I did, but that can't be, can it, brother?

(She advances on him.)

HENRY: Now Jane, calm down, it's not the end of the world... Hey, speaking of the end of the world, let's bring on a little post-apocalyptic fun with that novel formerly known as

Catherine, Northanger Abby!

SCENE 8

(Creepy abandoned laboratory in the distant future.)

(CATHERINE MORLAND and HENRY TILNEY race in, locking the door behind them. Their dress is a call back to well-known dystopian movies such as The Hunger Games or Mad Max. Everything is unnecessarily over-dramatic.)

HENRY TILNEY: That was way too close. The Peace Keepers nearly caught us that time!

(Catherine spots an old sign.)

CATHERINE: I can't believe it. "North Hanger Lab B"! Henry, this is it! We can finally find out what happened to your Life Mother!

HENRY TILNEY: I already told you. She died of The Sickness after The Fall of Second Briton.

CATHERINE: No. The Captain's done something with her or I'm not The Chosen One.

HENRY TILNEY: Not this again. There's a reason The Leaders banned those old fictions, Catherine! They're giving you crazy ideas. Anything but facts are an enemy to The Peace, don't you see that? They'll force us to compete in The Blood Sport with the other Abnormals!

CATHERINE: But The Rebellion— Oh, no!

(Moaning ZOMBIES start to break into the room.)

HENRY TILNEY: It's The Hungry Ones ready to tear us apart with their twisted mutant claws!

(There's a sound from the other door.)

CATHERINE: What's that? It could be the Gothicjay!

HENRY TILNEY: Or it could be more of them!

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(The zombies have broken in. Catherine and Henry Tilney try to fight them off but they're backed against the other door.)

Catherine, don't—

(Before Henry can stop her, Catherine opens it. On the other side is Jane Austen who is Not Amused. Catherine and Henry Tilney scream.)

CATHERINE & HENRY TILNEY: Aaaaah!

JANE: That's quite enough of that. Shoo. All of you.

CATHERINE, HENRY TILNEY & ALL OF THE ZOMBIES:
Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!

(Everyone but Jane and Henry Austen screams and runs off.)

HENRY: What was wrong with that one? The dystopian stuff is really hot right now.

JANE: Have you forgotten that I write comedies? You're trying so hard to update the books you're losing sight of why people liked them in the first place!

HENRY: Comedy, huh? I can do that.

SCENE 9

(The following is to be sung like a cheesy sitcom theme song. Feel free to add dancing and/or back-up singers. Set it to whatever tune you want. I hear the upbeat verses in my head as something like Leroy Anderson's "The Syncopated Clock" if you're looking for a starting point. ELINOR DASHWOOD should be prim and together while her sister MARIANNE should be more casual and disheveled.)

(Starts out slowly:)

ELINOR: WHEN EDWARD GOT ENGAGED AND IT WASN'T TO ME.

MARIANNE: AND I GOT DUMPED BY THAT CAD

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WILLOUGHBY.

ELINOR: RATHER THAN SOB AND BEMOAN OUR FATES...

(Gets upbeat:)

MARIANNE: WE DECIDED WE'D MAKE THE PERFECT ROOMMATES!

Want to read the entire script? Order a perusal copy today!