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From the novel by Jane Austen



*Sense
and
Sensibility*



One-act drama/comedy adapted by Ashley J. Barnard

Sense and Sensibility

Drama/Comedy. Adapted by Ashley J. Barnard. From the novel by Jane Austen. Cast: 5m., 5w. At the dawn of the Regency, two sisters, Elinor and Marianne, are thrust into poverty by their brother's scheming and manipulative wife. Reduced to living with their mother in a tiny cottage with their prospects for marriage nearly ruined, the sisters are nevertheless courted by three dynamic men, each with a dark secret. The shy and awkward Edward Ferrars wins Elinor's cautious but constant heart, neglecting to tell her he is already engaged to another. Colonel Brandon desperately loves Marianne, but his former attachment to the ill-fated Eliza and his old-fashioned habits fill Marianne with mistrust and disdain. Instead, Marianne, passionate and reckless, falls head-over-heels in love with the dashing Willoughby, only to be deserted when his true character emerges. Their hearts broken, Elinor and Marianne nearly give up on love until fate intervenes. Based on the classic by Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* is just as appealing today as it was when it was first published in 1811. *Two int. sets. Approximate running time: 45 minutes.*

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SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

Adapted

by

ASHLEY J. BARNARD

Based on the novel

by

JANE AUSTEN



Dramatic Publishing

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SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

CHARACTERS

FANNY DASHWOOD late 20s to early 30s
JOHN DASHWOOD late 20s to early 30s
MRS. DASHWOOD mid-40s
ELINOR early to mid-20s
MARIANNE late teens to early 20s
EDWARD FERRARS early to mid-30s
MRS. JENNINGS late 50s to early 60s
COLONEL BRANDON early to mid-40s
WILLOUGHBY early 20s
THOMAS mid-30s to early 40s

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

SCENE ONE

(Norland Manor, Sussex, England, in 1811 at the dawn of the Regency. Lights come up to reveal the drawing room of Norland Manor. There is a couch in the center of the room with a small table, as well as chairs, a desk and other furnishings set in various places around the room. Enter MRS. DASHWOOD, ELINOR and MARIANNE. MRS. DASHWOOD is drying her tears.)

MRS. DASHWOOD. Six weeks, and still my grief is such that it feels as though your father passed away only yesterday. And now adding insult to injury, being forced to live as my daughter-in-law's guest in my own home.

ELINOR. It is indeed a shame that Papa was forced to leave the estate to John. Perhaps...perhaps some allowance for us was made—

(Enter JOHN and FANNY DASHWOOD.)

MRS. DASHWOOD. John! We were unaware of your arrival. I trust you've been made comfortable.

JOHN DASHWOOD. Certainly, ma'am. *(Nodding to the girls.)* Elinor, Marianne. You remember Fanny?

FANNY. Mrs. Dashwood. Miss Dashwood. Miss Marianne.

(The three women curtsey.)

ELINOR. How do you do, Mrs. Dashwood?

FANNY. Well, thank you. My brother should be arriving shortly. He insisted on stopping by the booksellers on the way here and will be arriving by separate coach.

MRS. DASHWOOD. Your brother?

FANNY. Yes. Mr. Edward Ferrars. Perhaps I failed to mention he would be staying with us for some time.

MRS. DASHWOOD. Dear John...Fanny... If there is anything we can do to ensure your comfort, please do not hesitate to ask. And please be advised that...we mean to quit Norland as soon as possible, in order to avoid being of any further inconvenience.

FANNY. It is no inconvenience, I assure you.

MRS. DASHWOOD. Even so. I have sent out inquiries for new lodgings, and as soon as we find one that our modest income can afford, we shall move at once.

JOHN. On his deathbed my father asked that you be provided for. It will be my pleasure to present you with two thous— *(FANNY chokes. She and JOHN exchange a look.)* Two hundred pounds.

(Enter EDWARD FERRARS, nervously fidgeting with three books in his hands.)

FANNY. Ah! May I present my brother Edward Ferrars. Edward, this is Mrs. Dashwood, Miss Elinor Dashwood and Miss Marianne Dashwood.

(They curtsey and EDWARD bows.)

EDWARD. Mrs. Dashwood. Miss Dashwood. Miss Marianne. How do you do?

ELINOR, MARIANNE, MRS. DASHWOOD. How do you do?

EDWARD. I brought... (*Starts to extend the books then takes them back again.*) That is, I thought... (*He glances with uncertainty at FANNY, who takes the hint and exits with JOHN. EDWARD clears his throat and begins again.*) The truth is, we are imparting a monstrous inconvenience on the three of you, and at a time when your hearts are still sure to be in the deepest mourning. These are but trifles of my gratitude for your hospitality, and a terribly insignificant token to acknowledge your grief, but I thought perhaps...

ELINOR. This is terribly kind of you, Mr. Ferrars. Completely unnecessary but greatly appreciated.

EDWARD. Well I took a chance, in guessing what might appeal to each of you. I only hope my choices may please, if only in the slightest degree. (*Stepping forward and handing MRS. DASHWOOD a book.*) For Mrs. Dashwood.

MRS. DASHWOOD. *Three Tragedies of William Shakespeare!* Oh, Mr. Ferrars, I daresay these are my three favorite plays! *Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet* and...oh...*Titus Andronicus*. This was most kind of you.

EDWARD (*to ELINOR*). For Miss Dashwood.

ELINOR. *The Poetry of Lord Byron*. My favorite poet by far, Mr. Ferrars. I am quite overcome by your uncanny insight.

EDWARD. And for Miss Marianne.

MARIANNE (*brimming with excitement, her face literally falls when she reads the title.*) *The Mysteries of Udolfo* by Anne Radcliffe. Oh...thank you kindly, Mr. Ferrars.

EDWARD. You don't...you are not pleased.

MARIANNE. Oh, no, I am quite pleased.

EDWARD. I can see by your expression you are not. I fear I took the bookseller's advice for this one. He assured me that Gothic romances were all the rage for young women these days. You may be honest with me, Miss Marianne. My feelings shall not be wounded.

MARIANNE. I suppose for most young women they are. It's just that...

EDWARD. Pray, go on.

MARIANNE. It is simply this: will the future of woman-kind ever recover from the Gothic romance?

ELINOR. Marianne!

EDWARD. I'm afraid I don't understand you.

MARIANNE. What women suffer at the hands of the likes of Horace Walpole, Anne Radcliffe and—God forbid—Monk Lewis*! These simpering, whining ninnies that the authors have the gall to name “heroines,” who faint at the very hint of danger, a glimpse of blood, the whisper of a dark intent...all waiting helplessly, powerlessly for the gallant hero to come and rescue them. Well, don't you agree, Mr. Ferrars?

EDWARD. I'm afraid I lack the insight to honestly answer that question, Miss Marianne. I must confess, I have never read a Gothic romance, nor had I even heard of such a thing before my errand at the bookseller's today.

*The author of *The Monk*, Matthew Lewis, was nicknamed “Monk Lewis.”

MARIANNE. But surely you have an appreciation for the picturesque.

EDWARD. I like a fine prospect, but not on picturesque principles. I do not like crooked, twisted, blasted trees.
(*MARIANNE gasps.*)

ELINOR. Erm, Mr. Ferrars, will you do us the honor of reading from Lord Byron?

EDWARD (*hesitantly taking the book from ELINOR*). Certainly. I'd be...delighted.

(The women excitedly take their seats while EDWARD slowly takes his, reading from the book in a halting, awkward manner. The women listen attentively, all with forced pleasure; MARIANNE's disapproval the most evident.)

EDWARD.

She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes:

(The lights fade as EDWARD continues to read.)

Thus mellow'd to that tender light
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.

(BLACK.)

SCENE TWO

(Several weeks later. MRS. DASHWOOD and MARIANNE are seated next to each other on the couch, each opening and reading letters with increasing dismay.)

MARIANNE. Nothing. Nothing at all. It's either an uninhabitable shack or it's a manor we could never afford in our wildest dreams.

MRS. DASHWOOD. Well, we mustn't...What's this? *(Reading.)* "Dear Mrs. Dashwood, I understand you are in great need of new and modest accommodations. I hereby offer to you my small and charming house, the rent of which I shall extend to you on very easy terms. Though this furnished house is merely a cottage, I assure you that should this situation please you, everything shall be done to improve it that you may find necessary. The cottage is in Barton, near Devonshire. I pray you find these accommodations to your liking, and I patiently await your response. Sincerely, your cousin, Sir John Middleton."

MARIANNE. Oh, Mama! It is a perfect solution!

MRS. DASHWOOD. It is indeed! I shall accept his invitation immediately. My only regret will be separating Elinor from Edward, at such a volatile time in their relationship. But I am sure their separation will not last for long! In a few months, my dear Marianne, Elinor will in all probability be settled for life.

(Enter FANNY and JOHN.)

MRS. DASHWOOD. My dear Fanny, I have wonderful news to impart, and now that John and Elinor are present they may hear it as well. We have found accommodations and shall be leaving Norland immediately.

ELINOR. Have you, indeed?

MRS. DASHWOOD (*handing ELINOR the letter*). My cousin Sir John Middleton has a house in Devonshire which he has graciously offered to rent to us.

JOHN. Devonshire! And to what part of it?

MRS. DASHWOOD. Barton, within four miles northward of Exeter. It is but a cottage, but I hope to see many of my friends in it. And Edward will naturally be invited to visit as often as possible.

FANNY. I doubt Edward will have much time for visiting. I'm sure he'll be married soon with a house of his own to settle. My mother has very high hopes for Edward and our younger brother Robert. She wishes to see Edward in particular quite distinguished as a fine figure in the world, in parliament perhaps. Naturally his fortune depends on his marrying well; my mother is quite resolved upon that point. And any lowborn woman without any real prospects who might attempt to draw him in would threaten his inheritance.

(There is a moment of silence while everyone but FANNY shifts uncomfortably.)

JOHN. Well, suppose I could start loading the furniture on the cart.

(JOHN and FANNY exit as FANNY grins smugly at MRS. DASHWOOD.)

MRS. DASHWOOD. Are all your belongings packed?

ELINOR. Yes, Mama. As you advised, we packed weeks ago in anticipation of our departure.

MRS. DASHWOOD. Then I suppose I must dismiss the servants as Fanny wants nothing to do with them. Thomas, of course, will be coming with us, but we can afford no more than one servant. Oh, how happy I shall be to be out of that woman's company! (*Exits.*)

ELINOR. Oh, how I shall miss this place. Every nook and cranny has in it some sentimentality, some nostalgic remembrance of times long gone. What a shame we cannot make our travels as snails do, bearing our houses upon our backs. If we are to be leaving so soon, and by all indications we are, I should finish drawing my picture of the garden, so that we might remember it always. (*ELINOR starts to exit, but MARIANNE stops her with her voice.*)

MARIANNE. What a pity it is, Elinor, that Edward should have no taste for drawing.

ELINOR. No taste for drawing? Why should you think so? He does not draw himself, indeed, but he has great pleasure in seeing the performances of other people, and I assure you he is by no means deficient in natural taste, though he has not had opportunities of improving it.

MARIANNE. Do not be offended, Elinor, if my praise of him is not in everything equal to your sense of his merits. I have not had so many opportunities of estimating the more minute propensities of his mind, his inclinations, and tastes, as you have; but I have the highest opinion in the world of his goodness and sense. I think him everything in the world that is good and amiable.

ELINOR. I am sure that his dearest friends could not be dissatisfied with such commendation as that. I do not perceive how you could express yourself more warmly.

MARIANNE. When you tell me to love him as a brother, I shall no more see imperfection in his tastes than I now do in his heart.

ELINOR. I do not attempt to deny that I think very highly of him—that I greatly esteem him...that I like him.

MARIANNE. Esteem him! Like him! Cold-hearted Elinor! Oh, worse than cold-hearted! Use those words again and I will leave the room this moment.

ELINOR. Be assured that I meant no offense to you by speaking in so quiet a way of my own feelings. I am, however, by no means assured of his regard for me. There are moments when the extent of it seems doubtful, and till his sentiments are fully known, you cannot wonder at my wishing to avoid any encouragement of my own partiality by believing or calling it more than it is.

MARIANNE. Then you are not engaged to him!

ELINOR. Indeed not.

MARIANNE. Yet it certainly soon will happen. But two advantages will proceed from this delay. I shall not lose you too soon, and Edward will have greater opportunity of improving that natural taste for your favorite pursuit which must be so indispensably necessary to your future felicity. Oh! If he should be so far stimulated by your genius as to learn to draw himself, how delightful it would be! (*Rises to warmly embrace ELINOR.*) Before you retire to the garden, will you not indulge my fancy of reading Shakespeare with me, as we did as children, one last time in this drawing room?

ELINOR. My dear Marianne, I could deny you nothing.

(With a squeak of delight, MARIANNE retrieves the copy of Three Tragedies of William Shakespeare from the desk.)

MARIANNE. Which shall we read from? *Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet* or... *(making a face)* *Titus Andronicus*?

ELINOR. You choose, Marianne.

MARIANNE. Let us read from *Romeo and Juliet*. *(Thumbing through the book.)* Ah, Capulet's masquerade where they first meet, my favorite scene.

ELINOR. And shall you read Romeo's part as usual?

MARIANNE. Of course, Elinor. Shakespeare was little better than Anne Radcliffe in regard to women. *(Reading passionately:)*

“O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear—
Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!
So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows
As yonder lady o'er her fellows shows.
The—”

(EDWARD has entered, halting MARIANNE in mid-sentence.)

EDWARD. Oh, I beg your pardon. I am intruding. *(He turns to go but MARIANNE, seeing an opportunity, rushes after him and grabs his hand.)*

MARIANNE. Nonsense, Edward! I was only just lamenting my ill fortune at having to always read the men's parts to satisfy Elinor's passion of reading from Shakespeare. How fortuitous that you should have arrived to relieve me of my duty.