

Characters

Lady Susan Vernon (F)	35, a scheming beauty, recently widowed
Mrs. Alycia Johnson (F)	30s, her confidante in London
Miss Frederica Vernon (F)	16, Lady Susan's daughter
Mrs. Catherine Vernon (F)	30, Lady Susan's sister-in-law
Lady De Courcy (F)	50s, mother of Catherine & Reginald
Reginald De Courcy (M)	20s, unmarried brother of Catherine
Sir James Martin (M)	20s, pretentious suitor to Frederica
Mr. Manwaring (M)	40, Lady Susan's most recent lover

Act 1

Scene 1 – Langford

(Lights up to playful music as the characters enter forestage with great energy one by one, in a kind of dance. Each hands Lady Susan a letter and exits. She rejoices in her bundle and crosses to Langford. Lights up. Lady Susan, 35, a beauty, dressed in the best mourning fashion of the day. She holds a quill and letter and begins reading it aloud)

Susan: Langford, December one, 1800. My dear brother Vernon. I can no longer refuse myself the pleasure of your kind invitation, of spending some weeks with you at Churchill. Therefore, if quite convenient, I shall hope within a few days to be introduced to Mrs. Vernon whom I have so long desired to meet. My kind friends have urged me to prolong my stay here at Langford, but their cheerful dispositions are too much for my present state of mind, having lost my husband, your dear brother, just four months ago. I long to be made known to your dear little children, as I am on the point of separation from my own daughter, Frederica. The long illness of her Father prevented my attending to her education, and I fear that her governess was unequal to the charge. I have therefore enrolled her at one of the best private schools in town, where I shall deliver her on my way to you, dear Charles. Your most obliged and affectionate sister-in-law, Susan Vernon.

(Lights down)

Scene 2 - Churchill

(Lights up on Catherine, 30s, tastefully dressed, in a Parlour at her home.)

Catherine: Churchill, December five. My dear Mother. I am very sorry to tell you that we cannot spend Christmas with you. We are prevented that happiness by a letter my husband received today. That Woman, Lady Susan, has declared her intention of visiting us almost immediately. I was by no means prepared for such an event. Langford appeared so elegant--exactly the place for the exalted daughter of an Earl. My husband, I think was a great deal too kind to her, when he was in Staffordshire for his brother's funeral. Her behavior to him has been so ungenerous since our marriage was first announced, that no one less amiable than Charles could have overlooked it. An invitation to visit us at Churchill seems perfectly unnecessary. But Charles is always disposed to think the best of everyone. As for myself, I wonder as to her real meaning in coming to us. I shall certainly endeavor to guard myself against those attractive powers for which she is celebrated. She makes very gracious mention of my children, but it is unlikely that a woman who has behaved with inattention if not unkindness to her own child, should be attached to any of mine. Miss Frederica Vernon is to be placed at a school in town before her mother comes to us. My brother Reginald has long wished I know to see this captivating Lady Susan, and we shall depend on his joining our party soon. I am glad to hear that my Father continues so well, and am, with best love, Catherine Vernon.

(Lights down)

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Scene 3 – Edward Street and Langford

(Alycia Johnson sits in her London home at Edward Street. Lady Susan enters)

Alycia: My dearest friend. What a pleasure to see you here in Edward Street!

Susan: Is Mr. Johnson at home?

Alycia: No, it is quite safe. Come in at once and tell me why you have come to London.

Susan: I have brought Frederica to town and have deposited her under the care of Miss Summer's School, till she becomes more reasonable.

Alycia: But why have you quit Langford so soon? You said you had seldom spent three months more agreeably.

Susan: True, Mrs. Johnson. But it has all come undone. The females of the family are united against me.

Alycia: Yes, but is not Mr. Manwaring uncommonly pleasing?

(Lights up on Langford. Manwaring enters the room and Susan crosses to him. He kisses her hand. Susan continues talking to Alycia but interacts with Manwaring)

Susan: Oh yes.

Manwaring: (To Susan) Langford's beauty is much increased since your arrival, Madam.

Susan: (To Alycia) But I was determined to be discreet--to bear in mind my being only four months a widow. I have admitted no one's attentions but Manwaring's--avoided all general flirtation

Alycia: All?

Susan: Well, except Sir James Martin, on whom I bestowed a little notice in order to detach him from the Manwarings' niece, Maria.

(Manwaring exits, James enters, adjusts her shawl)

James: Madam, allow me.

Susan: Thank you, Sir James.

Alycia: Delightful!

Susan: But if the world could know my motive there, they would honor me--it was the advantage of my daughter that led me on, and if she were not the greatest simpleton on earth, I might have been rewarded for my exertions. Sir James did make proposals to me for Frederica, but Frederica, who was born to be the torment of my life, chose to set herself so violently against the match, that I thought it better to lay aside the scheme for the present.

(Frederica enters, James bows)

James: Miss Vernon.

Frederica: (He takes her hand. She pulls away) I am very much obliged, Sir. Pray excuse me.

Susan: (As Frederica exits) Frederica! Forgive us, Sir James.

James: Of course, Madam. She is. . . still much distressed over her father.

Susan: Very likely.

(James bows, exits. Susan returns to Alycia)

Alycia: (Holds out a glass of wine) A little refreshment?

Susan: Thank you. Were he but one degree less contemptibly weak I should marry him myself, but I must own myself rather romantic, in that riches only, will not satisfy me. The event of all this was very provoking, Alycia. Sir James has gone, Maria highly incensed, and young Mrs. Manwaring so enraged against me, that in the fury of her temper I should not be surprised at her appealing to her guardian, your husband. The whole family are at war, and Mr. Manwaring scarcely dares speak to me.

Alycia: My dear! And what do you propose?

Susan: I hope to spend some comfortable days with you here in town, and then must remove to that insupportable spot, a country village, for I am really going to Churchill.

Alycia: Churchill!

Susan: Forgive me, my dear friend, it is my last resource. Were there another place in England open to me, I would prefer it. Charles Vernon is my aversion, and I am afraid of his wife. At Churchill however I must remain till I have something better in view.

Alycia: Oh, Lady Susan, I wish I could offer—

Susan: Do not trouble yourself, Alycia. As I am little in favor with Mr. Johnson, you must come visit me at Upper Seymour Street these precious few days I am in town.

(Lights out on Edward Street)

Scene 4 – Parklands

(Lights up on Reginald De Courcy at his home. He is 20s, well dressed and attractive. Reads a letter)

Reginald: Parklands, December twelve. My dear Sister. I congratulate you and Mr. Vernon on being about to receive into your family the most accomplished coquette in England. I have been always taught to consider her as a very distinguished flirt, but lately I have heard some particulars of her conduct at Langford, which prove that she does not confine herself to that sort of honest flirtation which satisfies most, but aspires to the more delicious gratification of making a whole family miserable. By her behavior to Mr. Manwaring, she made his wife jealous, and by her behavior to another young man, deprived their amiable niece of her lover.

Lady DC: (Enters with a cup of tea) More tea, Reginald?

Reginald: Thank you, Mother. I was just relating to Catherine the latest episode of Lady Susan.

Lady DC: Then you are certain these accusations are justified?

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Reginald: I learnt it all from a Mr. Smith, who I dined with at Wilton Park. He had just come from Langford, where he was a fortnight in the house with her Ladyship.

Lady DC: How distressing! **(She exits)**

Reginald: (Resumes reading the letter) What a woman she must be, Catherine! I shall certainly accept your kind invitation, that I may witness those bewitching powers which can do so much, engaging at the same time the affections of two men who were neither of them at liberty to do so. And all this, without the charm of youth. I am glad to find that Miss Frederica does not come with her mother to Churchill, for she is, according to Mr. Smith's account, quite dull and equally proud. I shall be with you very soon, and am, your affectionate brother, Reginald R. De Courcy.

(Lights down on Parklands)

Scene 5 – Langford

(Lights up. Manwaring reads his letter)

Manwaring: Langford. December thirteen. My dear, charming Lady Susan. I have only time for a brief letter, as my tedious wife and niece Maria are entertaining a caller. Langford is unbearably dull and quiet at present. I can scarce eat or sleep without news of you. Do not forsake me, madam. Fate cannot continue to be so cruel. I will use Mrs. Manwaring's seal on this letter to avoid detection. Faithfully, R. Manwaring.

(Lights down on Langford)

Scene 6 – Dressing Room in Churchill

(Lights up. Susan holds a quill & letter)

Susan: Churchill. December thirteen. I received your note, my dear Alycia, just before I left town, and rejoice to learn that Mr. Johnson suspected nothing of our engagement the evening before. I arrived here in safety, and was cordially received. I have a real regard for Charles, he is so easily imposed on, but I confess myself not equally satisfied with his lady. I was as amiable as possible on the occasion, but all in vain, Catherine does not like me. To be sure, when we consider that I did take some pains to prevent my brother-in-law from marrying her, it is not very surprising. But since they have produced a male heir, the hope of acquiring Vernon Castle is lost to me forever. Their house is a good one; Charles is very rich, I am sure. But they do not know what to do with their fortune, keep very little company, and never go to town but on business. We shall be as stupid as possible. I mean to win my sister-in-law's heart through her children. I know all their names already and will shamelessly attach myself to young Frederic. Poor Manwaring! He is miserable; I need not tell you how perpetually he is in my thoughts. When I write to him, it must be undercover to you, Alycia. Yours ever, Susan Vernon.

Catherine: (Entering) Lady Susan. I hope I don't disturb you.

Susan: Not at all, Mrs. Vernon. How are dear little Frederic and Anna today? **(Folds the letter)** I am so anxious to see them again.

Catherine: They are quite well, thank you. Here is another letter from Mrs. Manwaring.

Susan: Oh, how kind. Such a faithful correspondent. Particularly given the numerous callers each morning and engagements each evening.

Catherine: Indeed.

Susan: I was just writing my dearest London friend, Mrs. Johnson, who is looking to all of Frederica's needs in town. **(She seals the letter)**

Catherine: And is Frederica settled comfortably at the school?

Susan: Oh yes. I want her to sing and draw, refining all those accomplishments which are now necessary to finish an attractive woman.

Catherine: Yes. Mr. Vernon and I are determined that our little Catherine will be mistress of French, Italian, and German as well as singing and drawing.

Susan: You are wise, no doubt, I'm sure. Now, let me express my heartfelt gratitude once again, Mrs. Vernon, at receiving me here at Churchill. And may I congratulate you on fitting the rooms with such fashion and charm.

Catherine: I am afraid we are a simple, quiet set, Lady Susan, and know very little of fashion.

Susan: Oh, but you do, my dear sister. Believe me, Churchill's elegance surpasses many of the estates nearer town.

Catherine: Well, I am glad you find it agreeable.

Susan: Certainly! I had rather not be staying in any other home in England just now. You and Charles are the dearest objects of my family, outside Frederica, of course, and I know my own darling husband will rest easy knowing we are friends. We are, aren't we, Mrs. Vernon?

Catherine: Of course.

Susan: Good. I'm so glad. And now I must attend to my trunks, to locate the trinkets I brought from London for the children. If you'll excuse me.

Catherine: Certainly.

(Lights out on Dressing Room)

Scene 7 – Parlour. Churchill

(Lights up. Catherine enters with a vase of flowers she arranges)

Catherine: Churchill. December fourteen. Well my dear Reginald, the dangerous creature has arrived and I must declare that I have seldom seen so lovely a woman. One would not suppose her more than five and twenty, tho she must in fact be ten years older. Her address to me was so gentle and affectionate, that if I had not known how much she has always disliked me for marrying Mr. Vernon, I should have imagined her an attached friend. She talks with a happy command of language, which is too often used to make black appear white. She speaks of her daughter with so much tenderness, that I am amazed to recollect how often her Ladyship stayed in town, while her daughter was left behind in Staffordshire to the care of servants. It seems hard to believe that it was really Lady Susan's choice to leave Langford for Churchill. Your friend Mr. Smith's story however cannot be quite true, Reginald, as she corresponds regularly with Mrs. Manwaring. At any rate, it must be exaggerated; it is scarcely possible that two men should be so grossly deceived by her at once. Yours, Catherine.

(Lights down on Parlour)

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Scene 8 – Dressing Room and Parlour.

(Lights up on Dressing Room. Lady Susan holds quill, letter)

Susan: Churchill. December twenty. My dear Alycia. You are very good in taking notice of Frederica. She is a stupid girl and has nothing to recommend her. Not that I am an advocate for the prevailing fashion of learning all the languages; it will not add one lover to her list. Grace and manner, after all, are of the greatest importance. I hope to see Frederica the wife of Sir James within a twelvemonth. School must be very humiliating to a girl of Frederica's age; and I wish her to find the situation as unpleasant as possible. I shall trouble you meanwhile to prevent Sir James from forming any other attachment when he comes to town; invite him to Edward Street and take pains to talk about Frederica that he may not forget her. Some mothers would have insisted on their daughter's accepting so great an offer on the first overture, but I merely propose to make it her own choice by rendering her thoroughly uncomfortable till she does accept him. But enough of this tiresome girl. You may well wonder how I contrive to pass my time here, and for the first week, it was most insufferably dull. Now however, we begin to mend, as our party is enlarged.

(Susan crosses to the Parlour. Catherine and Reginald enter)

Catherine: Lady Susan, may I present my brother, Reginald De Courcy.

Reginald: It is a privilege, Lady Susan.

Susan: No, sir, the privilege is all mine.

Reginald: And how do you tolerate our corner of the country?

Susan: Oh, to be sure, I find Churchill a true beauty.

Reginald: Many have said so.

Susan: I am most particularly grateful for the peace that surrounds it, which allows for daily reflection.

Reginald: Indeed.

(She enters the Dressing Room. The others talk quietly, and exit)

Susan: There is something about him that rather interests me, a sort of sauciness of familiarity that I shall teach him to correct. He is lively and seems clever, and may prove to be an agreeable flirt. There is exquisite pleasure in subduing an insolent spirit, and it shall be my endeavor to humble the pride of these self-important De Courcys still lower. This project will serve at least to amuse me. Yours ever, S. Vernon.

(Lights down on Dressing Room)

Scene 9 – Parlour and Garden.

(Lights up on Parlour. Catherine holds quill and letter)

Catherine: Churchill. December thirty. My dear Mother. You must not expect Reginald back again for some time. He desires me to tell you that he intends to prolong his stay in Sussex. He means to send for his hunters immediately, and it is impossible to say when you may see him in Kent. I will not disguise my sentiments on this change.

(Lights up on Garden - Susan and Reginald enter deep in conversation)

Catherine: Lady Susan has certainly contrived in the space of a fortnight to make my brother like her. What stronger proof of her dangerous abilities can be given? When he first came, he considered her entitled to very little respect. I confess that her behaviour has been very carefully calculated, as I have not detected the smallest impropriety in it. And she is altogether so attractive, that I should not wonder at his being delighted with her--if had he known nothing of her previously. But against reason, against conviction, to be so well pleased with her, does really astonish me.

(Lights down on Garden. Reginald approaches Catherine in Parlour)

Reginald: Have you ever seen the like of her anywhere in England, Catherine?

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Catherine: Lady Susan?

Reginald: Of course. Lady Susan. I could not be surprised at any effect produced on the heart of man by such loveliness.

Catherine: But brother, what of . . . her reputation?

Reginald: Oh, I am quite sure, my dear sister, that whatever errors might have occurred in the past are to be imputed to her neglected education and early marriage. But now, certainly you must be struck by her gentleness and sincere affection for family.

Catherine: Yes, but—

Reginald: And her delicacy of manners. She is altogether a most astonishing woman.

(He exits, she finishes the letter)

Catherine: This tendency to excuse her conduct, or to forget it in the warmth of admiration vexes me greatly. Lady Susan's intentions are of course those of absolute coquetry. It mortifies me, Mother, to see a young man of Reginald's sense duped by her. I am, your devoted, Catherine.

(Lights out in Parlour)

Scene 10 – Edward Street

(Lights up. Alycia holds a quill and letter)

Alycia: Edward Street. January five. My dearest Susan. I congratulate you on Mr. De Courcy's arrival, and advise you by all means to marry him; his father's estate is considerable. The old Sir Reginald is very infirm, and not likely to stand in your way long. And tho no one can really deserve you, my dearest Susan, Mr. De Courcy may be worth having. Manwaring will storm of course, but you may easily pacify him. And now to the point of my letter. I have seen Sir James. He came to town for a few days last week, and called several times in Edward Street.

(James enters, Alycia turns to him)

Alycia: So, Sir James, you have quitted Langford for London.

James: Ah! Most definitely, Mrs. Johnson. The keenest of Langford's pleasures have long since departed. As you know, I was a great admirer of your close friend Lady Susan and her delightful daughter.

Alycia: Yes, but did you not extend this attention to the young niece, Miss Maria Manwaring as well?

James: No, I protest! Any attentions there were only in jest! Miss Manwaring! Really, Mrs. Johnson, a more pitiful creature is not to be found in the entire county.

Alycia: I understand she has grown quite thin.

James: Oh yes. I don't know what man could abide it.

Alycia: What man, indeed. And her face, I'm sure, offers none of the unspoiled beauty found in young Frederica.

James: Ah! Be assured, Miss Vernon and her mother provided all the beauty at Langford.

Alycia: Frederica has grown even more attractive, I am happy to report, under the tutelage of Miss Sommers.

James: Indeed?

Alycia: Oh yes. She grows more accomplished and amiable each day.

James: I am glad to hear it. Lady Susan must be in high spirits. Ah, what delightful creatures!

(Sir James kisses her hand and exits. Alycia finishes her letter)

Alycia: So you see, my dear Susan, he is so far from having forgotten the Vernon women, that I am sure he would marry either of you with pleasure. He is very agreeable and as silly as ever. Yours faithfully, Alycia.

(Lights down on Edward Street)

Scene 11 – Dressing Room

(Lights up. Lady Susan holds a quill and letter)

Susan: Churchill. January eight. My dear friend. I am very much obliged to you for your advice respecting Mr. De Courcy. At present, however, I cannot resolve on anything so serious as marriage. It is true that I am vain enough to believe a marriage within my reach, and can now enjoy the pleasure of triumphing over a mind at first prepared to dislike me. I see plainly that his sister is uneasy, but I think I may defy her. I have made Reginald, I may venture to say, at least half in love with me, without the semblance of common-place flirtation.

Reginald: **(Entering)** Lady Susan, do I disturb you?

Susan: Mr. De Courcy, I am always happy to quit any task to attend you or your family.

Reginald: Do you write your daughter again this morning?

Susan: Oh yes. It is my one comfort in our dreadful separation.

Reginald: I was wondering if I might accompany your ride today?

Susan: Oh, Mr. De Courcy, I could not impose on you so tedious a duty.

Reginald: It is no duty, Lady Susan, I assure you.

Susan: Well, then, sir, I would be honored.

(Reginald bows and exits. Susan finishes the letter)

Susan: It has been delightful to watch his advances towards intimacy. Reginald is not unworthy the praise you have given him, but is still greatly inferior to our friend at Langford. His attentions do serve, however, to make those hours pass very pleasantly which would be otherwise spent endeavoring to overcome my sister in law's reserve, or listening to her husband's insipid talk. Your account of Sir James is most satisfactory, and I mean to give Miss Frederica a hint of my intentions very soon. Yours, etcetera, S. Vernon.

(Lights out on Dressing Room)

Scene 12 - Parlour

(Lights up. Catherine writes a letter)

Catherine: Churchill. January ten. My dearest Mother. I really grow quite uneasy about Reginald. He and Lady Susan are frequently engaged in long conversations—it is impossible to see the intimacy between them without some alarm. He is not at all disposed to leave us, and I have given him as many hints of our Father's precarious state of health, as common decency will allow. Her power over him must now be boundless, as she has persuaded him not merely to forget, but to justify her former conduct.

Reginald: **(Entering)** But Catherine, has she not always acted in a most gracious and proper manner? Why would you continue to question her character?

Catherine: My love, what of Mr. Smith's account of her behavior at Langford, where she seduced both Mr. Manwaring and a young man engaged to his niece?

Reginald: All a scandalous invention, I am sorry to say, by a man who was desirous of the lady's attentions and unable to succeed. Imagine that, imposing on the affections of a woman whose husband had been gone but a few months!

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(He exits)

Catherine: **(Finishing the letter)** Dearest Mother, I wish you could get my brother away under any plausible pretence. How sincerely do I grieve that she ever entered this house! Yours affectionately, Catherine.

(Lights down on Parlour)

Scene 13 – Parklands

(Lights up. Lady De Courcy reads her letter)

Lady D C: Parklands. January twenty. Dearest Reginald. I know that young men in general dislike interference in affairs of the heart; but I hope, my dear son, that you will allow for a mother's anxiety. You must be aware that as an only son, your conduct in life holds much interest to your family. In marriage especially, there is everything at stake; your own happiness, that of your parents, and the credit of your name. I do not suppose that you would deliberately form an imprudent engagement, but I cannot help fearing that you may be drawn into it. Lady Susan's age is itself a material objection, but her want of character is much more serious. Were you not blinded by a sort of fascination, it would be ridiculous to repeat the instances of great misconduct on her side. Her neglect of her husband and her encouragement of other men were so notorious, that no one can now forget them. In addition, we know that she did, from the most selfish motives of maintaining Vernon Castle, take all possible pains to prevent Catherine's marriage. Your father's years and increasing infirmities make me very desirous my dear Reginald, of seeing you settled in the world. The fortune of your wife will be inconsequential, but her family and character must be unexceptionable. You know that it is out of our power to prevent your inheriting the family estate. But be assured, Reginald, it would destroy every comfort of your father's life if you were to marry Lady Susan Vernon. If you can give me your assurance of having no design beyond enjoying the conversation of a clever woman for a short period, you will restore me to happiness; but if you cannot do this, explain to me at least what has so greatly altered your opinion of her. I am, as ever, Lady De Courcy.

(Lights down on Parklands)

Scene 14 – Garden. Churchill

(Lights up. Reginald reads his letter)

Reginald: My dear Mother. I have this moment received your letter, and am filled with astonishment. I am to thank my sister, I suppose, for giving you all this alarm. I entreat you, my dear Madam, to quiet your mind over an impending marriage. I have no other intentions towards Lady Susan than to enjoy for a short time (as you have yourself expressed it) the conversation of an accomplished woman. Catherine is unhappily prejudiced against Lady Susan, as she cannot forgive those endeavors to prevent her own marriage. But in this case, as well as in many others, the world has most grossly injured that lady.

(Susan enters. Reginald turns to her)

Susan: You have all been so generous to me here at Churchill, that I feel compelled to explain my behavior to your sister when she and Mr. Vernon first became attached.

Reginald: Be assured, Madam, there is no necessity.

Susan: Oh, I do not suggest any anxiety but my own. Please, allow me this one indulgence, Mr. De Courcy. I would be easier if you, in particular, knew the truth of the endeavor.

Reginald: As you wish.

Susan: I blush to relate this now, as I know of no one with as little inclination to do evil as your sister. But at the time, I heard something about her that convinced me Mr. Vernon's happiness would be absolutely destroyed.

Reginald: Pray, madam, what did you hear?

Susan: Please do not force me to relate that which was obviously a malicious lie. An important lesson was learned in the experience; as I no longer pay any heed to general gossip, since no character, however upright, can escape the malevolence of slander.

Reginald: **(Returning to the letter)** My dear Mother, if my sister could not avoid censure, who could? I blame myself severely for having so easily believed the scandalous tales invented by Archibald Smith. **(To Susan)** Oh, he offends me, deeply. To think it nothing but mere fabrication.

Susan: I am all in amazement. Mr. Smith seemed such a gentleman at Langford.

Reginald: It undoubtedly serves to amuse him.

Susan: May I be completely open, Mr. De Courcy, and consult you on this delicate matter in more detail? You have always demonstrated a keen understanding.

Reginald: By all means.

Susan: I must admit to one small portion of truth in Mr. Smith's accusations. You see, Sir James Martin confided in me that after exposing himself to the charms of Miss Maria Manwaring, he believed her only object to be his fortune. Thereafter, Miss Frederica and I took pity on such a noble and worthy friend. We three spent many enjoyable hours together for a brief period. But as soon as Miss Manwaring's resentment was made known to me, I determined it best to leave Langford at once. What else could I do?

(Susan exits. Reginald finishes the letter)

Reginald: I am convinced, Mother, that in coming to Churchill, Lady Susan was governed only by the most honorable intentions. Her regard for Mr. Vernon is of the highest order, and her wish of obtaining my sister's good opinion merits a better return than it has received. If you are not equally convinced by my solemn assurance that your fears have been most idly created, you will deeply mortify and distress me. I remain, Reginald De Courcy.

(Lights out on Garden)

Scene 15 – Parlour

(Lights up. Catherine holds two letters, one open and one folded)

Catherine: Churchill. February one. My dear Mother. I return you Reginald's letter, and rejoice with all my heart that you are made easy by it. But between ourselves, I must own it has only convinced me of no *present* intention of marrying Lady Susan. He gives a very plausible account of her behavior at Langford, but his intelligence, remember, comes from herself. He is very severe against me indeed, and I hope I have not been hasty in my judgment of her. Tho I have reasons enough for my dislike, I cannot help pitying her at present, as she is in real distress. She had this morning a letter from the lady with whom she has placed her daughter.

(Susan enters, holding a letter)

Catherine: There is no hope, then, of Miss Frederica returning to the school?

Susan: Miss Sommers demands that she be "immediately removed," declaring that none of her young ladies has ever attempted to run away, and her school's reputation must be considered. What could that girl have been thinking?!

Reginald: **(Enters and hands Susan a glass of wine)** Mr. Vernon will sort it soon enough. They are readying the horses.

Catherine: Where was she planning to go?

Susan: Who can say? I do not understand her.

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Catherine: Mr. Vernon will do his best to prevail on Miss Sommers to let Frederica continue with her. And if he cannot succeed, she will be brought here.

Susan: No! I mean, you have been so kind, I could not impose such a willful girl upon your house.

Reginald: It does seem after all, a sort of reward for behavior deserving very differently.

Catherine: But what else can be done? Mr. Vernon must bring her here, at least until some other situation can be found for her.

Susan: I fear you are right. But if she must come to Churchill, I promise it will not be for long.

Catherine: As you wish.

Susan: And it will be absolutely necessary, as you must understand, to force myself to treat Frederica with some severity while she is here.

Reginald: It is entirely unfair that you should suffer for her perverseness!

Susan: I am afraid I have been often too indulgent. You must support me, both of you, by urging the necessity of reproof, if I become too lenient.

(Susan and Reginald exit)

Catherine: (Finishes the letter) Her Ladyship is comforting herself meanwhile by strolling along the garden with Reginald, calling forth all his tender feelings. She talks vastly well, too well to feel so very deeply. But I will not look for faults. She may be Reginald's wife. Heaven forbid it! Well, whatever may be my brother's fate, we have the comfort of knowing that we have done our utmost to save him. Yours ever, Catherine.

(Lights out on Parlour)

Scene 16 – Dressing Room and Langford

(Lights up. Lady Susan holds quill and letter)

Susan: My dearest Alycia. Never was I so provoked in my life as by a letter I received this morning from Miss Sommers. When Frederica received the letter in which I declared she was to marry Sir James, that horrid girl actually attempted to run away. She meant, I suppose, to go to the Clarkes in Staffordshire, for she has no other acquaintance. She shall be punished, and she shall accept Sir James. I have sent Charles to town to manage matters if he can, for I do not want her here. Frederica is too shy I think, and too much in awe of me, to tell tales; but if the mildness of her uncle should get anything from her, I am not afraid. I trust I shall be able to make my story as good as hers. If I am vain of anything, it is of my eloquence. Young Reginald continues to attend me. I like him on the whole very well, but there is a sort of ridiculous delicacy about him that requires the fullest explanation of whatever he may have heard to my disadvantage. This is one sort of love, but I confess I infinitely prefer the devoted and liberal attention of Manwaring, which is satisfied that whatever I do must be right.

(Lights up on Manwaring at Langford)

Susan: Poor fellow! He is quite distracted with jealousy.

Manwaring: **(Reads a letter)** Langford, February twelve. My most exquisite madam. I have reports of the young De Courcy spending excessive time at Churchill, and confess I am mad with wondering of his attention. How can any rational man be in your company and resist becoming ardently attached? Is it so, my dearest Susan? Oh, you poor, sweet, beautiful creature, made to suffer among such stupid country people. Has the dullness of your days led you to forget my fervent adoration? Let me come incognito to some nearby inn so that we may renew our passion at once! Your most devoted, Robert Manwaring.

(Lights out on Langford)

Susan: Of course I have forbidden any such venture. Women who *totally* disregard the opinion of the world are reckless fools. But I must admit, Alycia, to relishing the depth of his despair, as I know no better proof of love. Yours always, S. Vernon.

(Lights out on Dressing Room)

Scene 17 – Parlour

(Lights up)

Catherine: Churchill. February twenty-five. My dear Mother. Mr. Vernon returned on Thursday night, bringing his niece with him. I never saw any creature look so frightened in my life as Frederica.

(Susan, Reginald, and Frederica enter)

Susan: Well, here she is, all safe and sound. **(Frederica stands, frozen)** Frederica, please. Come and greet your aunt.

Frederica: Aunt Vernon. **(Bows)**

Catherine: Welcome to Churchill, my dear.

Susan: And this is Mr. De Courcy.

Frederica: Sir.

Reginald: Miss Frederica. **(Bows)**

Susan: Well? **(Looks expectantly at her daughter)** What have you to say?

Frederica: Me?

Susan: Why, yes.

Frederica: Nothing, mother.

Susan: Nothing?

Catherine: Pray, shall we be seated?

(Frederica sits at Catherine's urging. The others follow. Silence)

Susan: Well.

Frederica: Forgive me. **(She exits quickly, crying)**

(Susan starts to follow, is overcome. Looks to Reginald. He consoles her. They exit)

Catherine: (Continues the letter) Lady Susan's pathetic display of emotion convinced me she did in fact feel nothing. I am more angry than ever since I have seen her daughter. The poor girl looks so unhappy that my heart aches for her. There is a peculiar sweetness in her look when she speaks either to her uncle or me, and I feel our simple attentions have engaged her gratitude. I have not yet been able to have any real conversation with my niece. She is shy, and I think some pains are taken to prevent her being in my presence.

Frederica: (Enters Parlour) Oh, I beg your pardon, Aunt Vernon.

Catherine: Come in, child, come in.

Frederica: I do not wish to impose.

Catherine: Not at all. What are you about today?

Frederica: I am in search of a book I was reading yesterday.

Catherine: Is this it?

Frederica: Oh, yes, thank you, Ma'am.

Catherine: Please sit with me a while, Frederica.

Frederica: Oh, I couldn't. (**Looking to the door**)

Catherine: I had hoped we could be better acquainted.

Frederica: You are very kind. I wish . . . Ma'am, please know that—

Susan: (**Enters**) What's this? Imposing on your generous Aunt Vernon? Please forgive her. I am afraid she grows weary of her music study. Lazy girl. Your uncle generously installed the pianoforte in my dressing room to allow for regular practice. Let us not disappoint him!

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(Susan and Frederica exit)

Catherine: (**Continues the letter**) I have not yet been able to ascertain her reason for running away. Her kindhearted uncle was too fearful of distressing her to ask many questions as they travelled here. Frederica spends the great part of each day in Lady Susan's dressing room. Poor creature, her window overlooks that lawn where she may daily observe her mother walking in earnest conversation with Reginald. A widow barely four months! A girl of Frederica's age must be childish indeed, if such behavior does not strike her. Yet Reginald still thinks Lady Susan is the best of mothers!

(Reginald enters)

Catherine: Do you not think she is a trifle too severe with the child?

Reginald: Not at all.

Catherine: Frederica does not seem to have the sort of temper to make severity necessary.

Reginald: But look at her actions, Catherine. Running away from a respectable establishment to please an idle fancy!

Catherine: Yet Miss Summers declares Miss Frederica showed no sign of obstinacy during her stay at the school.

Reginald: Yes, which proves there was no true cause or provocation. Merely a selfish desire to escape the rigors of education.

(He exits)

Catherine: I am overcome, my dear mother. Oh Reginald! How your judgement is enslaved! Your devoted, Catherine.

(She exits. Lights out on Parlour)

Scene 18 – Garden

(Lights up on Frederica reading in the Garden as Reginald enters)

Reginald: Miss Frederica. (Surprised)

Frederica: Oh. Mr. De Courcy.

Reginald: You are taking the air today.

Frederica: Yes, sir.

Reginald: It is a fine afternoon.

Frederica: Oh, yes, very fine. I have always preferred reading outdoors.

Reginald: Indeed? What do you read?

Frederica: Nothing, only a little history.

Reginald: Really? Ancient or modern?

Frederica: Of England, sir.

Reginald: Ah! Do you prefer Cooper or Goldsmith?

Frederica: I must admit to a fondness for Goldsmith, Mr. DeCourcy.

Reginald: Excellent.

Catherine: (Enters) Did you not know, dear brother, that we have an historical scholar in the house?

Reginald: No, I confess I did not.

Catherine: I find there is little our library can offer that she does not already know.

Reginald: Very admirable, Miss Vernon. Excuse me, I'm expected at the stables.

(He bows and exits. Frederica looks after him)

Catherine: There was a time when Reginald, too, spent hours in study. Lately he has been otherwise occupied.

Frederica: Certainly he has a wide knowledge. I have never seen his like before.

Catherine: Your little cousins have been asking for you again, my dear. Would you mind a brief visit to the nursery?

Frederica: Oh, no. It would give me great pleasure, ma'am. That is, if my Mother has no need for me.

Catherine: No, I believe she is still at her letters this morning.

(They exit. Lights down in Garden)

Scene 19 – Dressing Room and Parlour

(Lights up. Lady Susan holds a quill and letter)

Susan: Churchill. March one. My dear Alycia. You will be eager I know to hear something farther of Frederica. She arrived a fortnight ago, and I found myself to have been perfectly right. The thought of marrying Sir James frightened her so thoroughly that she set out for Staffordshire. The insolent child had really got as far as the length of two streets in her journey when she was fortunately overtaken. Such was the first distinguished exploit of Miss Frederica Susanna Vernon, and if we consider that it was achieved at the tender age of sixteen, we can only surmise the course of her dubious future. But there is more, my dear friend. It astonishes me to discover that Frederica is actually falling in love with Reginald De Courcy.

(Lights up in the Parlour. It is evening. Catherine, Reginald and Frederica enter. The women look at engravings in a book while Reginald holds a candelabra so they may see)

Susan: I never saw a girl of her age, bid fairer to be the sport of mankind. She is so naïve to her charming attractions, she is sure of being ridiculed and despised by every man who meets her. She is in high favour with her aunt —largely because Mrs. Vernon dearly loves attention and Frederica willingly indulges her. When she first came, I was at some pains to prevent her seeing much of her aunt, but I have since relaxed, after laying down some strict rules she dare not disobey.

(Lights out in Parlour. All exit. Susan finishes her letter)

Susan: But do not imagine, my dear Alycia, that I have for a moment given up my plan of her marriage; tho I have not quite resolved on the manner of bringing it about. Yours ever, S. Vernon.

(Lights out on Dressing Room)

Scene 20 - Parlour

(Lights up on Catherine and Reginald in Parlour)

Catherine: Churchill. March ten. My dear Mother. We have a very unexpected guest with us at present. He arrived yesterday.

(Frederica enters, running up to Catherine)

Frederica: (Enters) Oh, he is come! (Runs up to Catherine) Sir James is come, and what am I to do?

Catherine: Who is come?

Frederica: Sir James Martin. Mother has sent for me. I am quite undone!

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Reginald: Calm yourself, my dear.

Frederica: But where can I go? Oh, how will I ever—

Susan: (Entering with Sir James) Frederica! Here you are. Well, what do you think, Mrs. Vernon? Today we have received an unexpected surprise. Allow me to present Sir James Martin.

James: Ah madam! Please excuse the liberty I have taken in coming to Churchill, but you know the whims of titled gentlemen!

Catherine: You are most welcome, I'm sure.

Susan: This is her brother Mr. De Courcy.

Reginald: Sir James.

Susan: And here is our lovely Miss Frederica.

James: Ah! Your obedient servant. (Bows, kisses her hand) What a distinct pleasure to see you again.

Susan: Sir James is a great friend of the Manwarings, and we became acquainted last summer at Langford.

James: And I bring greetings from another friend, Mrs. Johnson, by way of London.

Susan: How kind! Frederica, do come over here. (Frederica obeys silently) Do you not find her complexion much improved, Sir James?

James: Enchanting!

Reginald: Your journey, sir, it was pleasant, I hope?

James: Oh, pleasant enough, and if permitted to rest a few days here, Mrs. Vernon, I should be most grateful. I am aware that it is very impertinent of me, taking the liberty of a relation as it

were, but, then perhaps it may not be long before we are more . . . intimately connected?
(Looks meaningfully at Frederica)

Susan: Perhaps we should take advantage of the fine afternoon by walking outdoors awhile? Sir James may then relate all the latest events in town. Frederica, would you see to my pelisse? Such an obliging child. Gentlemen, we shall attend you directly.

(All exit except Susan and Catherine)

Susan: Mrs. Vernon, may I have a word with you in private?

Catherine: Certainly.

Susan: My dear sister, I was never more surprised in my life than by Sir James' arrival, and the suddenness of it requires some apology to you. He is a young man of excellent character, a little too much of the rattle perhaps, but he is a very eligible match for Frederica. I never mentioned the likelihood of it's taking place while she continued at school, but now, as I am convinced that she is too old to submit to school confinement, I had intended within a few days to acquaint you with the whole business. So congratulate me, my dear sister, on a match that will make Frederica amply provided for.

Catherine: Well, I--I wish Frederica a very happy future.

Susan: Oh, thank you! My dear Mrs. Vernon, much as I heard your praise before meeting you, I had no idea that I should ever love you as a cherished sister. And your friendship is more particularly gratifying because I have reason to believe that some attempts were made to prejudice you against me. I only wish they--whoever they are--could see the real affection we now feel for each other! God bless you, for your goodness to me and my Frederica.

(Susan exits)

Catherine: (Finishing the letter) What can one say of such a woman, my dear Mother? Such earnestness, such solemnity of expression! Yet I cannot help questioning the truth of everything she said. Frederica deserves a better fate than to be Sir James Martin's wife. Something must be done for this poor girl, if her feelings are such as both her uncle and I believe them to be--but she seems reluctant to confide in me. Yours, Catherine.

(Lights out in Parlour)

Scene 21 – Dressing Room and Garden

(Lights up on Dressing Room and Garden. Frederica, waits anxiously in the Garden. Reginald approaches, and she hails him in an urgent whisper)

Frederica: Mr. De Courcy!

Reginald: Frederica. What is it?

Frederica: Oh sir. I would . . . Here, read this. Please!

(She thrusts a folded letter in his hand, then runs to the Dressing Room, sits and recites the letter while Reginald reads it silently)

Reginald: Mr. De Courcy. I hope you will excuse this liberty. I am forced upon it by the greatest distress. I am very miserable about Sir James Martin, and have no other way in the world of helping myself but by writing to you, for I am forbidden ever speaking to my uncle or aunt on the subject. This being the case, I am afraid it will appear deceitful, as if I attended only to the specifics and not the spirit of Mama's commands. But you must take my part and persuade her to break it off, for I cannot bear him. I cannot apologise enough for this letter, I know it is taking so great a liberty and I am aware how dreadfully angry it will make Mama, but it is my only hope. I am Sir, your most humble servant. Frederica Vernon.

End of Act I

Act 2

Scene 1 – Dressing Room/Garden

(Lights up on Frederica in the Dressing Room, as at the end of Act I)

Reginald: (Approaches the Dressing Room) Miss Vernon? Are you within?

Frederica: Yes.

Reginald: Pardon me. May I speak with you?

Frederica: By all means. Pray sit down, Mr. De Courcy. You read my letter?

Reginald: Yes.

Frederica: Please forgive my impertinence. I didn't know what to do.

Reginald: I must confess I am amazed. You have no regard for Sir James?

Frederica: Oh, no.

Reginald: You have never been attached to him?

Frederica: No, never. It is not a sudden fancy I assure you, sir. I always thought him silly and disagreeable, and now he is grown worse than ever.

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Reginald: Truly?

Frederica: I would rather work for my bread than marry him. Please believe me.

Reginald: Do not despair, Miss Frederica. Lady Susan is aware of your distress?

Frederica: Oh, yes, but she declares it is a most agreeable match and I should be grateful to receive his attentions. But I do not want them. I avoided him daily at Langford, though Mother seemed pleased with his company. Let her marry him if he is so worthy a husband!

Reginald: Lady Susan . . . marry Sir James?

Frederica: Please forgive me, sir. I have said too much already. I'm sorry.

(She exits to Garden. Lights up in Garden)

Reginald: Wait!

(He follows her to the Garden. Lights down on Dressing Room)

Reginald: Please—my dear Miss Vernon . . .

Frederica: Oh, Mr. De Courcy, it is unbearable.

Reginald: Surely it cannot be as bleak as it seems.

Frederica: I believe you are the one person who might prevail with my mother. If you will have the great kindness of persuading her to send Sir James away, I shall be more obliged to you than is possible to express.

(She exits. Lights down on Garden)

Scene 2 – Dressing Room

(Lights up on Dressing Room)

Susan: Churchill. March ten. My dearest Alycia. I was never so enraged before, and must relieve myself by writing to you. Who should come but Sir James Martin! I could have poisoned him. I made the best of it, however, and told my story with great success to Mrs. Vernon. I made Frederica understand that I was absolutely determined on her marrying Sir James. I have for some time been more particularly resolved on the match, from seeing the rapid increase of her affection for Reginald. Sir James, tho extremely gallant to me, very soon made the whole party understand that his heart was devoted to my daughter. They couldn't help perceiving that Sir James was no Solomon, but I soon convinced all on the aptness of the match. And then! A sudden disturbance of all my schemes, and from a direction least expected!

Reginald: (Entering) Your Ladyship, may I speak with you?

Susan: Please do. You look troubled, Mr. De Courcy. Are you unwell?

Reginald: No, I am in perfect health, Madam. It is the well-being of another that troubles me.

Susan: How kind, but there is little sign left of my cold, I assure you.

Reginald: I am glad to hear it. But it is your daughter, Madam, that concerns me at present.

Susan: Frederica?

Reginald: Just so.

Susan: Yes, her obstinacy injures me greatly. I am sure the fault is mine—

Reginald: No, I wonder at the propriety of allowing Sir James to continue his attentions.

Susan: Propriety? (Susan sits) Whatever do you mean?

Reginald: The young lady does not desire them, I think.

Susan: Oh, sir, we all know the caprice of young women on matters of the heart. And Frederica, I am sorry to say, has not much common sense.

Reginald: I beg your pardon, Madam, but Miss Frederica has clearly expressed her inclinations on the gentleman. Would it not be unkind to allow it to proceed?

Susan: I must confess I am astonished. By whose commission do you reprimand me thusly?

Reginald: I received a letter.

Susan: A letter? From Frederica?

Reginald: Yes.

Susan: Good God! Please allow me to apologise for her impertinence—

Reginald: No, I believe her distress is quite sincere, and upon speaking with her further, I find she is nearly overcome with fear and apprehension. I have questioned her particularly about Sir

James' behaviour at Langford, the nature of his attentions to your daughter, and . . . to you.
(Pause) I confess to a great uneasiness with the situation, Madam.

Susan: I cannot imagine what fantasies Frederica has imparted, for fantasies they must be if they imply any . . . any—Reginald! Have you no reliance on my sense or goodness?

Reginald: Please, Madam, I did not mean to discredit your motives—

Susan: But you do, you are. And based on the word of an insolent, willful girl.

Reginald: It is an honest feeling, I can assure you.

Susan: Then you assume the worst of me? You, to whom I have confided as no other? Have you no resentment on my behalf which such a friendship would dictate?

Reginald: I merely suggest that you reconsider the match.

Susan: Your accusations suggest a greater indignity, Mr. De Courcy.

Reginald: Then please do me the courtesy by way of an explanation, Lady Susan. I assure you I am eager to hear it.

Susan: I am not accustomed to defending attacks on my character from sources whose questionable natures are widely recognised.

Reginald: She is your daughter, Madam.

Susan: (Pause) Thank you for your kind inquiries, Mr. De Courcy. I find that I grow fatigued. Pray excuse me.

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Reginald: Your Ladyship.

(De Courcy bows. Susan does not. He exits)

Susan: **(Finishing the letter)** He can have no true regard for me, or he would not have listened to her. And she, with her little rebellious heart, to throw herself into the protection of a young man with whom she had scarcely exchanged two words! I am equally confounded at her impudence and his credulity. I have not yet tranquillised myself enough to see Frederica. She shall soon find that she has poured forth her tender tale in vain! Yours affectionately, S. Vernon.

(Lights out in Dressing Room)

Scene 3 – Parlour

(Lights up)

Catherine: Churchill. March twelve. Let me congratulate you, my dearest Mother. The affair that has given us so much anxiety is drawing to a happy conclusion. Reginald is finally returning to Parklands. I was sitting here about half an hour ago when my brother sought my counsel.

Reginald: **(Enters)** Catherine, I am going home today. I am sorry to leave you, but I must. It is a great while since I have seen Father and Mother. If you have any letter for them, I shall be happy to take it.

Catherine: Thank you.

Reginald: But before I leave, I must warn you of one thing. Do not let Frederica Vernon be sacrificed to ambition. Sir James wants to marry her, but she cannot endure the idea of it. Be assured that I speak from the fullest conviction of the truth. She is a sweet girl, and deserves a better fate. Send him away immediately. He is only a fool--but what her mother can mean, heaven only knows!

Catherine: My dear Reginald—

Reginald: Goodbye, Catherine, I do not know when you will see me again. But remember what I tell you of Frederica, you must do everything in your power for her. She has a far superior character than we were led to believe.

(He exits)

Catherine: For a full minute or two I remained in the same spot, overpowered by wonder--of a most agreeable sort indeed. He and Lady Susan must have quarreled, and about Frederica, too. After about ten minutes, her Ladyship entered the room and I looked for a confirmation in her face.

Susan: Ah, Mrs. Vernon. I find that we are going to lose Mr. De Courcy. Is it true that he leaves Churchill this morning?

Catherine: So I have just been informed.

Susan: Well, he told us nothing of all this last night, or even this morning at breakfast. Young men are often hasty in their resolutions. I should not be surprised if he were to change his mind at last, and not go.

(Susan exits)

Catherine: Her calmness astonishes me. When next I write, I hope to tell you that Sir James is gone, Lady Susan vanquished, and Frederica at peace. I finish as I began, dear mother, with the warmest congratulations. Yours ever, Catherine Vernon.

(She exits. Lights out on Parlour)

Scene 4 – Garden & Dressing Room

(Lights up in Garden, as Frederica enters, crying, sits on bench. Catherine enters with a letter)

Catherine: My dear Mother, every hope which but two hours ago made me so happy, is vanished. The quarrel between Lady Susan and Reginald is made up, and we are all as we were before. One point only is gained; Sir James Martin is dismissed. Who could have foreseen what has happened? Reginald was all but gone; his horse almost brought to the door! For half an hour we awaited his departure. I then determined to look for Frederica, whom I had not seen since breakfast. **(She crosses to Frederica)** Whatever is the matter?

Frederica: My dear Aunt, he is going. Mr. De Courcy is going and it is all my fault. I am afraid you will be angry, but indeed I had no idea it would end so.

Catherine: My love, do not think it necessary to apologise to me on that account. I know my father wants very much to see him. But what is it that you have done to occasion all this?

Frederica: I was so unhappy about Sir James--I have done something very wrong I know--but you have no idea what misery I have been in, and Mama had ordered me never to speak to you or my uncle about it.

Catherine: You therefore spoke to my brother, to engage his interference?

Frederica: No, I, I wrote to him.

Catherine: You *wrote* to him?

Frederica: I know it is highly improper, my dear aunt, but I did not know what else to do.

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Catherine: Frederica, you ought to have told me of your distress. You would have found in me a friend ready to assist you.

Frederica: Oh, I did not doubt your goodness, but believed that Mr. De Courcy was the one person to succeed with my mother. But I was mistaken. Mama will never forgive me, and I shall be worse off than ever.

Catherine: No, you shall not. Your applying to Reginald can bring only good to all parties. Depend upon it, you shall not be made unhappy any longer. Now, go inside and rest.

(Frederica exits Garden. Reginald and Susan cross nearby and Catherine sees Reginald kiss Susan's hand. Susan exits. Reginald sees Catherine and goes to her in the Garden)

Reginald: Catherine—

Catherine: Are you going?

Reginald: No, sister, I am not going. Will you let me speak to you a moment?

Catherine: Of course.

Reginald: I find that I have been acting with my usual foolish impetuosity, and was on the point of leaving the house under a false impression. I have entirely misunderstood Lady Susan. Frederica does not comprehend her mother and will not confide in her. Lady Susan, therefore, does not always know what will make her daughter happy.

Catherine: Indeed?

Reginald: Yes, and furthermore I had no right to interfere. In short Catherine, everything is now all happily settled. Sir James is going and Frederica is safe. Lady Susan, I believe, wishes to speak to you about it, if you are at leisure.

Catherine: Certainly.

(Lights up on Lady Susan in the Dressing Room as Catherine approaches)

Susan: Did not I tell you that your brother would not leave us after all?

Catherine: You did indeed.

Susan: It occurred to me that his departure might be caused by a conversation that we had this morning. I instantly determined that an accidental dispute should not deprive you of your brother, and lost no time in clearing it up. Apparently Frederica had set herself violently against marrying Sir James.

Catherine: And can your Ladyship wonder that she should? Frederica has an excellent understanding, and Sir James has . . . none.

Susan: Sir James is certainly under par, and had I known her to possess so much ability as she does, I should not have been anxious for the match.

Catherine: It is odd that you alone should be ignorant of your daughter's sense.

Susan: It is distressing to say, but Frederica is afraid of me. During her poor father's life she was a spoilt child; and the severity I have since been forced to show since his death has entirely alienated her affection.

Catherine: Oh?

Susan: But I am determined to forget every circumstance that might throw blame on the memory of her dear father.

Catherine: I see. And your disagreement with my brother?

Susan: It originated in an impertinent action of my daughter's. You see, she . . . *wrote* to Mr. De Courcy.

Catherine: I know she did. **(Susan gasps)** Generally it is not proper for unmarried women to write to eligible men. But you had forbidden her speaking to me of her distress; what could she do therefore but apply to my brother?

Susan: Good God! What an opinion you must have of me! Can you possibly suppose that I was aware of her unhappiness? That it was my object to make my own child miserable?

Catherine: What then was your intention when you insisted on her silence?

Susan: My dear sister, why should I subject you to entreaties which I refused to attend myself? I was mistaken, it is true, but I believed myself to be right.

Catherine: Did you not know she disliked Sir James?

Susan: I knew that she had some small anxieties, but no more than that. You must not question me however, my dear sister, too minutely on this point. Frederica so often makes me . . . very unhappy. Her applying to Mr. De Courcy hurt me particularly.

Catherine: Did not Frederica's objection to Sir James deserve attention? Why should your Ladyship quarrel with my brother for his heartfelt interference?

Susan: Reginald believed me more to blame than I really was. It would have sensibly hurt me, if our acquaintance had ended so gloomily. Now, as I am convinced of Frederica's dislike for Sir James, I shall instantly demand that he give up all hope of her. An unfortunate misunderstanding; I reproach myself for having ever made her unhappy. Excuse me, my dearest sister, for thus trespassing on your time, but after this explanation, I trust I am in no danger of sinking in your opinion.

(Lights down in Dressing Room. Catherine exits to Garden, finishing the letter)

Catherine: I left her almost in silence. It was the greatest stretch of forbearance I could practise. Her assurance, her deceit--my heart sickens within me. Soon after I learned that Sir James' carriage was at the door. How easily does her Ladyship encourage or dismiss a lover! In spite of this release, Frederica still looks unhappy. Poor girl, there is now no hope of her affection for Reginald being returned. Prepare, madam, for the worst. The probability of his marrying Lady Susan is surely heightened. When that wretched event takes place, Frederica must wholly belong to us. Yours ever, Catherine Vernon.

(Lights down on Garden)

Scene 5 – Dressing Room

(Lights up. Susan holds a quill and letter)

Susan: Churchill. March thirteen. I call on you dear Alycia, for congratulations. I am again triumphant. When I wrote to you the other day, I was in high irritation. I have had more trouble in restoring peace than I ever intended. This Reginald has a proud spirit; I shall not easily forgive his insolence. He was actually on the point of leaving Churchill! So, I sent a servant to say that I desired to speak with him before he went. He came immediately and seemed astonished at the summons.

Reginald: **(Enters)** Madam.

Susan: I beg your pardon, sir, for the liberty I have taken in sending to you. I feel it my duty to entreat that you will not shorten your visit here, even an hour. I am perfectly aware that after what has passed between us, it would ill suit the feelings of either to remain longer in the same house.

Reginald: So it would seem.

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Susan: But sir, it is too great a sacrifice, to leave relations to whom you are so dear. My removal therefore, is the answer.

Reginald: No, madam, I'm sure my sister—

Susan: Where I go is of no consequence to anyone; but you are of importance to all your dear family.

Reginald: Please, your Ladyship, do not speak so. Your company is highly regarded by many who are privileged—

Susan: No, you are kind, but I have passed the age when youth or beauty can be of much consequence.

(She stands very near him)

Reginald: Your beauty and charm, Lady Susan, cannot compare with any woman in England. Indeed, should I live to be a hundred, I think I shall never meet the like! Please, won't you explain to me what has caused this misunderstanding?

Susan: As you wish. Shall we continue in the garden?

(Reginald bows and exits)

Susan: Oh! How delightful it was to watch the struggle between returning tenderness and the remains of displeasure. And yet, humbled as he now is, I cannot forgive him such an instance of pride. At present my thoughts are fluctuating between various schemes. I must punish Frederica for her application to Reginald; I must punish him for receiving it so favorably; and I must torment my sister-in-law for her triumphant manner since Sir James was dismissed. Therefore, I propose to take Frederica to town, and marry her immediately to Sir James.

Send me your opinion on all these matters, my dear Alycia. Your most attached, Susan Vernon.

(Lights down on Dressing Room)

Scene 6 – Edward Street

(Lights up. Alycia holds a quill and letter)

Alycia: Edward Street. March fifteen. Dear Susan. I am gratified by your confidence, and this is my advice: that you come to town yourself without loss of time, but that you leave Frederica behind. It would surely be much more to the purpose to marry Mr. De Courcy, than to irritate the rest of his family, by making Frederica marry Sir James. You should think more of yourself, and less of your daughter. She is not of a disposition to do you credit in the world, and seems precisely in her proper place at Churchill with the Vernons. But you are fitted for society, and it is shameful to have you exiled from it. And Susan, I have another reason for urging this. Manwaring came to town last week.

(Manwaring enters. She offers him a sweet)

Alycia: Confection?

Manwaring: You know what I want, Mrs. Johnson. Tell me all that has transpired between her Ladyship and this De Courcy fellow.

Alycia: Sir! Your wife and her guardian, my husband, would find your inquiry imprudent.

Manwaring: To be sure, Mrs. Manwaring is becoming more and more intolerable. Silly woman, did she expect constancy from a man of society? But neither her, nor the world's opinion matters to me anymore. Tell me, I beg you, has Lady Susan been taken in by this country squire?

Alycia: Taken in?

Manwaring: I shall go mad for want of knowing her present affections.

Alycia: Pray calm yourself, Mr. Manwaring.

Manwaring: But her letters grow shorter and fewer each week!

Alycia: She has been much preoccupied with the affairs of her daughter.

Manwaring: I must see her! Speak to her! Show her my unimpeachable devotion. Under what pretext can I arrange a visit?

Alycia: A visit?!

Manwaring: I wish to meet this Reginald De Courcy.

Alycia: Oh no, calling on Lady Susan at Churchill would be highly inadvisable!

Manwaring: Well then, you must contrive a plan to get her here! If not, I will go mad!

(Manwaring exits. Alycia finishes the letter)

Alycia: If you do not allow him to see you, I fear he may commit some great imprudence. Besides, if you take my advice, and resolve to marry Mr. De Courcy, it will be necessary for you to get Manwaring out of the way, and you only can have influence enough to send him back to his wife. Come to town as soon as you can. Mr. Johnson is going to Bath, where if the waters are favorable to his condition and my wishes, he will be laid up with the gout many weeks. During his absence we shall be able to choose our own society and have true

enjoyment. I would ask you to stay here at Edward Street, but that my husband has strictly forbidden it. Therefore, I look forward to seeing you soon in Upper Seymour Street.
Adieu, Yours, Alycia.

(Lights down in Edward Street)

Scene 7 - Parklands

(Lights up on Lady De Courcy. Reginald enters with a folded letter and kisses Lady De Courcy)

Reginald: Mother.

Lady D C: My dear. Welcome home.

Reginald: Thank you. You are well, I see. And Father?

Lady D C: The season's early warmth does him good, I think.

Reginald: I'm glad. Oh, Catherine sends her love, and here are the latest details of the children, Mr. Vernon, etcetera. **(He hands her a letter)**

Lady D C: Thank you. And has . . . all her company departed?

Reginald: Not all. Lady Susan has gone to London, to see her particular friend, Mrs. Johnson. She intended that Frederica should accompany her, but the child seemed unwilling, and Catherine insisted Frederica remain with them. And, as Lady Susan is so devoted a mother, she consented.

Lady D C: I see. And do you make plans soon for London?

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Reginald: Perhaps. Is Sir Reginald in the library? I wish to speak to him.

Lady D C: Yes, he has been at some letters for more than an hour. Try to persuade him to rest a bit.

Reginald: I'll do my best.

(He exits)

Lady D C: (Opens the letter, reads) This letter, my dear Mother, will be brought to you by Reginald. His long visit is to be concluded at last. Lady Susan is departing, but Frederica remains. The girl was wretched in the idea of going to London, and I could not bear to have her at the mercy of her mother. Here we shall in time be at peace. Our books and conversation, the children; every domestic pleasure will, I trust, gradually overcome her youthful attachment to Reginald. How long Lady Susan will be in town, I know not. Reginald spent many hours in the garden with her before she left. If he leaves you soon for London, I fear we must resign ourselves to their certain union. Yours, Catherine Vernon.

(Lights down on Parklands)

Scene 8 – Edward Street

(Lights up. Alycia holds a quill and letter)

Alycia: Edward Street. April five. My dearest friend. I write with great distress; the most unfortunate event has just taken place. Mr. Johnson has just heard that you were soon to be in London, and immediately contrived to have such an attack of the gout as to prevent his journey to Bath. I am pleased to find that my letter had so much effect on you, and that De Courcy is certainly your own. Let me hear from you as soon as you arrive, and in particular tell me what you mean to do with Manwaring. It is impossible to say when I shall be able to see you. It is such an abominable trick, for my husband to be ill here, instead of at Bath, where his old aunts would have nursed him. Yours ever, Alycia.

(Lights down on Edward Street)

Scene 9 – Upper Seymour Street

(Lights up on Lady Susan writing a letter)

Susan: Upper Seymour Street. April eight. My dear Alycia. I have always detested Mr. Johnson, and this recent fit of the gout only increases my aversion. To have you confined, a nurse in his apartment! What a mistake you made in marrying a man of his age! Too old to be agreeable, and too young to die! But let me tell you of Manwaring! I arrived here last night about five, when he immediately made his appearance.

(Manwaring enters, kisses her hand)

Manwaring: My dear Susan!

Susan: Oh, Edward!

Manwaring: How it has tortured me to be parted from you!

Susan: And I from you.

Manwaring: You grow more beautiful every time we meet. I am more devoted than ever!

Susan: I will not deny what real pleasure his sight afforded me, nor how strongly I felt the contrast between his manners and those of Reginald. I shall put off Reginald's arrival, under some pretense or other. He must not come until Manwaring is gone. I have convinced Manwaring that my acquaintance with Reginald is nothing more than a passing flirtation; and he is tolerably appeased. Yours ever, Susan Vernon.

(Lights down on Upper Seymour Street)

Scene 10 – Parklands

(Lights up on Reginald. He opens a letter and reads)

Reginald: My dear Reginald. I have received your letter and tho I am gratified by your impatience for our next meeting, I feel the necessity of delaying that hour. Do not think me unkind without first hearing my reasons. In the course of my journey from Churchill, I had ample leisure for reflection, and have come to believe that prudence is the best course. Our passion has fueled this hasty engagement, but we must remember I have now been a widow but a few months. We must consider that the indelicacy of so early a second marriage must subject me to the censure of the world, and, most insupportably, incur the displeasure of your dear family. Be well assured that nothing but the strongest conviction of duty could induce me to urge such caution. By a removal for some months from each other, we shall certainly tranquillise the sisterly fears of Mrs. Vernon. Let me hear from you soon, very soon. I am faithfully yours,
Susan Vernon.

(He crumples the letter and exits hastily. Lights down on Parklands)

Scene 11 – Upper Seymour Street

(Lights up. Susan holds a letter)

Susan: My dearest Alycia. That tormenting creature Reginald is here. My letter, which was intended to keep him longer in the country, has hastened him to town. Much as I wish him away however, I cannot help being pleased with such a proof of attachment. He is devoted to me, heart and soul.

(Reginald enters, with a flower)

Susan: He will carry this note himself, which is to serve as an introduction to you. Allow him to spend the evening with you, that I may be in no danger of his returning here, as Manwaring comes within half an hour. I have told him that I am not quite well, and need to rest. You will not find him a heavy companion, and I allow you to flirt with him as much as you like. At the same time, do not forget my real interest; say all that you can to convince him that I shall be quite distraught if he remains here; you know my reasons—propriety and so forth. Adieu. S.V.

(She gives him the letter)

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Susan: Give Mrs. Johnson my love; you will find her a cherished friend. How glad I am you two can finally meet. Till tomorrow?

Reginald: Till tomorrow, when you are feeling better.

(He kisses her hand, exits. Lights down on Upper Seymour Street)

Scene 12 – Edward Street

(Lights up. Alycia holds a quill and letter)

Alycia: My dear creature. I am in agonies, and know not what to do. Mr. De Courcy arrived, just when he should not. The furious *Mrs.* Manwaring had that instant entered the house, in pursuit of her husband. Regrettably, I was not at home to intervene. Everything that you might wish to be concealed, was revealed. That woman had wormed out of Manwaring's servant that her husband had visited you every day since you came to town! What could I do? Facts are such horrid things. All is now known to Mr. De Courcy. If Manwaring is with you, he had better be gone. At any rate, I hope he will plague his wife more than ever. For your comfort, let me assure you she has fretted herself thinner and uglier than ever. With anxious wishes, Alycia.

(Lights down on Edward Street)

Scene 13 – Upper Seymour Street

(Lights up. Susan has two letters, one folded, one open)

Susan: My dear Alycia. How unlucky that you should have been from home. I am undismayed however. Do not torment yourself with fears on my account. Depend upon it, I can make my own story good with Reginald. Manwaring has just gone; he himself brought me the news of his wife's arrival. Silly woman! What does she expect by such maneuvers? I wish she had stayed quietly at Langford. Reginald will be a little enraged at first, but by tomorrow's dinner, everything will be well again. Adieu. S. Vernon.

(Lights down on Upper Seymour Street)

Scene 14 – London Hotel

(Lights up on Reginald. He holds a letter)

Reginald: London Hotel. April sixteen. Madam. I write only to bid you farewell. The spell is removed. I see you as you are. Since we parted yesterday, I have received from indisputable authority such an history of you as must bring an immediate and eternal separation. You cannot doubt to what I allude; Langford--Langford--that word will be sufficient. I received my information in Mr. Johnson's home, from Mrs. Manwaring herself. You know how I have loved you and can judge my present feelings; but I am not so weak as to find indulgence in describing them to a woman of such cold artfulness. R. De Courcy.

(Lights down on Hotel)

Scene 15 – Upper Seymour Street

(Lights up. Susan holds two letters, one open, one folded)

Susan: My dear Reginald. I will not attempt to describe my astonishment on reading the note, this moment received from you. What can Mrs. Manwaring have told you, to occasion so extraordinary a change in your sentiments? I cannot suppose that the old story of Mrs. Manwaring's jealousy can be listened to again. Come to me immediately, and explain what is at present absolutely incomprehensible. Believe me, the single word of Langford is not enough. I have little heart to jest; for to be sunk, tho' but an hour, in your opinion, is unbearable. I shall count every minute till your arrival. As ever, Susan.

(Lights down on Upper Seymour Street)

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Scene 16 – Hotel

(Lights up. Reginald holds a letter)

Reginald: Madam. Why would you write to me? Why do you require particulars? But since it must be so, I am obliged to declare that all the accounts of your misconduct since the death of your husband, have been undeniably proved to me. Nay, more, I am assured that a connection has for some time existed, and still continues to exist between you and the man whose family you robbed of its peace! You have corresponded with him ever since your leaving Langford--not with his wife--but with *him*--and he now visits you every day. Can you, dare you deny it? And all this at the time when I was an encouraged, an accepted lover! After such a discovery as this, you will scarcely wonder at my meaning in bidding you adieu. My understanding is at length restored, and teaches me to abhor your artifice and to despise my weakness. R. De Courcy.

(Lights down on Hotel)

Scene 17 – Upper Seymour Street

(Lights up. Susan holds two letters, one open, one folded)

Susan: Mr. De Courcy. I am satisfied, and will trouble you no more when these few lines are dismissed. The engagement which you were eager to form a fortnight ago, is no longer, and I rejoice to find that the prudent advice of your parents has not been given in vain. I flatter myself with the hope of surviving my share in this disappointment. S. Vernon.

(Lights down on Upper Seymour Street)

Scene 18 – Edward Street

(Lights up on Alycia)

Alycia: Edward Street. April eighteen. My dear Susan. I am grieved, tho I cannot be astonished at your rupture with Mr. De Courcy. I must say De Courcy really is handsome and has such an open, good humoured countenance that one cannot help loving him at first sight. Alas, he leaves London today. Now it seems the Manwarings are to part; and he is gone, too. I am afraid Mrs. Manwaring will return to live with us again. But she still frets so much about him that perhaps she may not live long. Be assured that I partake in all your feelings and do not be angry if I say that our intercourse even by letter must soon be given up. It makes me miserable--but Mr. Johnson threatens that if I persist in our connection, he will settle in the country permanently. You must understand how deplorable that kind of exile would be for me. Adieu, my dearest Susan. That unlucky visit to Langford! But I dare say you did all for the best, and there is no defying destiny! Your sincerely attached, Alycia.

(Lights out on Edward Street)

Scene 19 – Upper Seymour Street

(Lights up on Susan. She holds four letters)

Susan: My dear Alycia. I yield to the necessity which parts us. Under such circumstances you could not act otherwise. In happier times, when your situation is as independent as mine, we will unite again in the same intimacy as ever. **(She tosses the first letter)** Meanwhile, I can safely assure you that I never was better satisfied with myself and everything about me, than at the present hour. Your husband I abhor—**(She tosses the second letter)** Reginald I despise--**(She tosses the third letter)** But Manwaring is more devoted to me than ever; and were he at liberty, I doubt if I could resist even matrimony offered by him. **(She wistfully drops the fourth letter)** I am now satisfied that I never could have brought myself to marry Reginald; and am equally determined that Frederica never shall. Tomorrow I will fetch her from Churchill, and Frederica shall be Sir James' wife before she quits my house. She may whimper, and the Vernons may storm, I regard them not.

(She picks up the letters)

Susan: I am tired of submitting my will to the caprices of others--to whom I owe no duty and for whom I feel no respect!

(She destroys the letters in a momentary fit)

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Susan: Adieu, Alycia, dearest of friends. May the next gouty attack be more favorable. And may you always regard me as unalterably yours. S. Vernon.

(Lights out on Upper Seymour Street)

Scene 20 – Parklands

(Lights up on Lady De Courcy. She holds a letter)

Lady D C: Parklands. April nineteen. My dear Catherine. I have charming news for you, for Reginald is this day returned from London, not to ask our consent to marry Lady Susan, but to tell us that they are parted forever! He has been only an hour in the house, and he is so very low, that I have not the heart to ask questions. This is a most joyful hour. Nothing is wanting but to have you here, and it is our particular wish that you would come to us as soon as you can. Pray bring all my grandchildren, and your niece, of course. Frederica runs much in my thoughts, and when Reginald has recovered his usual good spirits, we will try to rob him of his heart once more. Yours affectionately, Mother De Courcy.

(Lights out on Parklands)

Scene 21 – Churchill

(Lights up on Catherine)

Catherine: Churchill. April twenty. My dear Madam. Your letter has surprised me beyond measure. Can it be true that they are really separated for ever? After all that I have seen, do we dare depend on it? My surprise is the greater, because on Wednesday, the very day of Reginald's returning to Parklands, we had a most unexpected visit from Lady Susan, looking all cheerfulness and good humour. She stayed nearly two hours, was as affectionate as ever, and not a hint was dropped of any coolness between them. Your kind invitation, Mother, is accepted with pleasure. I wish we could bring Frederica with us, but I am sorry to add that her Mother's errand was to fetch her away.

(Susan and Frederica enter)

Susan: Frederica, dear, you can have no notion of how I have missed you! I do hope you haven't been a burden for the Vernons in my absence?

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Frederica: No, Mama.

Catherine: No, indeed. She is emersed in her studies, and we enjoy her company thoroughly. And have you seen my brother since his arrival in town?

Susan: Oh yes, he was kind enough to call on Monday, but I believe he has since returned home.

Catherine: Indeed? And are you also abandoning London?

Susan: Oh, no. My plans are to be in town several months, and I could not be easy if Frederica were not with me.

Catherine: We had hoped to keep your daughter with us for the summer.

Susan: You are most kind, dear Sister, but we have imposed on your good will too long.

Frederica: Must I, Mother?

Susan: Yes, my dearest. It is all arranged.

Catherine: There is nothing I can say that would alter your thinking on this matter?

Susan: As a general rule, Mrs. Vernon, I would hesitate to contradict yours or Mr. Vernon's wishes on family matters, but in this instance I am quite resolved. I have taken great pains to engage all the fashionable tutors, and these arrangements require that we return to London today.

Frederica: Today!

Catherine: Within the hour.

Catherine: Well, so then it is all settled.

Susan: To the very best of my abilities. Come along, Frederica, we must begin your packing.

(Susan exits. Catherine detains Frederica)

Catherine: You will write to us very often, will you not, Frederica?

Frederica: Oh, yes, Aunt Vernon.

Catherine: Good. You can always depend on our friendship, my dear.

Frederica: It is my sole comfort in the world!

Catherine: Then remember us, if you find yourself in distress at any time.

Frederica: Thank you, Aunt Vernon.

(They embrace, then Frederica exits. Catherine returns to the letter)

Catherine: The poor girl's heart was almost broke at taking leave of us. I wish there were a better prospect of the match which your letter suggests. At present it is not very likely. Yours,
Catherine Vernon.

(Lights out on parlour)

Scene 22 – Upper Seymour Street

(Lights up. Susan hands Frederica a letter to read and sign)

Frederica: Upper Seymour Street. May ten. My dear Aunt Vernon. Pray forgive the length of time since my last letter. I am much engaged with my studies and spend many pleasant hours at them each day. Mother and I make regular calls to her numerous friends, and I am growing more confident in good society. I think of you and the children often and hope you are all well. Please do not be anxious; London has proven most felicitous. Yours affectionately,
Frederica Vernon.

(Susan smiles and takes the letter. Lights out on Upper Seymour Street)

Scene 23 – Upper Seymour Street

(Lights up on Catherine in front of Upper Seymour Street)

Catherine: London. May twenty. My dear Mother. I will return from London victorious, as Frederica is once again to be installed at Churchill. My trip, as you know, was motivated in part by a suspicion that her letters were being written under her mother's instruction, and in part by our alarm after hearing from Reginald what passed between he and Lady Susan. I was met with such cheerful attention as to make me almost turn away in horror!

(Lights up on Upper Seymour Street, Susan, Frederica, Catherine)

Susan: Dearest Sister, come in. How delightful to see you again! Do sit down. We are deeply indebted by your call. Will Mr. Vernon's business keep you in London long?

Catherine: (Embracing Frederica) No, just one or two days it seems.

Susan: What a pity! It will not allow me to give a proper dinner in your honor as I'd often hoped I could. Frederica, is it not a disappointment?

Frederica: Yes, Mama. **(She returns to her needlework)**

Catherine: I trust you are making good progress in your studies, Frederica?

Frederica: Yes, Aunt Vernon.

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Susan: Oh, you are too modest, my dear. In truth, she grows more and more each day to be what any parent could desire. Whenever we are in company, my friends remark with delight on her accomplishments!

Catherine: And is Sir James among your company?

Susan: Sir James? No, I do not believe he is in London at present. But how good it is to see you again. Isn't this a wonderful surprise, Frederica?

Frederica: Oh, yes. You will stay for tea, Aunt Vernon?

Catherine: I regret that Mr. Vernon has made other arrangements. I confess, I called today with the hopes of persuading your mother to let you return to Churchill with us.

Frederica: To Churchill?!

Catherine: The children ask after you daily.

Susan: How kind! Frederica speaks often of her pleasurable stay with you and Mr. Vernon. We are obliged, but I couldn't possibly bring her to Churchill at present.

Catherine: If I may pursue the point, your Ladyship, you would not have to trouble yourself--we are most eager to have our niece with us again, and would willingly accompany her at any time.

Susan: You are most thoughtful, to be sure, but I have grown to depend on Frederica, you see. There is so little time we are given with our children, is it not so, Mrs. Vernon?

Catherine: Indeed. **(Pause)**

Susan: But I am glad you have come, because I am in need of another opinion concerning Frederica's health.

Catherine: Her health?

Susan: Oh, it is of little consequence, I'm sure, but do you think she looks as well as she did at Churchill? I confess some doubt of London's perfectly agreeing with her.

Catherine: Perhaps. She does have a delicate constitution.

Susan: That is so.

Catherine: To speak truth, I had noticed a want of color in her cheeks.

Susan: There! I knew it was more than a mother's anxiety. And there are reports of influenza in town.

Catherine: Influenza! Bless me.

Susan: As for myself, I am not worried, my health has always been reliable. But Frederica's delicacy, as you say, could be more susceptible to errant disease.

Catherine: Then I beg you to reconsider, Lady Susan. Please allow me to remove my niece at once, so that you may suffer no more anxiety on that account.

Susan: Perhaps you are right--a short visit only, until her strength returns. I should learn to think less of what I require and more of what Frederica requires. You are all prudence, my dear Mrs. Vernon. Once again I yield to your rational mind. What do you say, Frederica? Do you wish to visit Churchill again?

Frederica: Oh, yes, mother!

Susan: Then we are agreed!

(Lights out on Upper Seymour Street)

Scene 24 – Dressing Room

(Lights up. Catherine brings Frederica a letter)

Catherine: Frederica? A letter from Lady Susan.

Frederica: Oh. Thank you.

(Catherine turns to exit)

Frederica: Please stay. **(She reads)** She is still in London. "My dearest Frederica. I am happy to oblige your request to remain at Churchill longer than the six weeks agreed upon. I know I have been remiss in my correspondence for the last month, but you will understand my behaviour when you hear the news. Sir James Martin and I are . . . **(She gasps)** . . . married." Gracious!

Catherine: (Takes up the letter) "Shortly after you left for the country, he returned and begged permission to call. It did not take long to develop the most tender feelings for so charming, so devoted a gentleman. You know I have always admired him, and feel perfectly assured of a most harmonious union. I cannot say when next we will meet, as Sir James and I leave almost immediately on a trip abroad. Give me joy, Frederica. Yours affectionately, S. Vernon."

(They laugh and embrace. Lights down on Dressing Room)

Scene 25 – Parlour and Garden

(Lights up on Catherine)

Catherine: July nine. My dear Mother. Life at Churchill could not be more felicitous. As we suspected, Frederica grows more enchanting each week she is absented from her mother. We have had only one brief note from Lady Susan in the two months since her departure. Frederica is wholly and surely ours now. Tho I suspect we may not claim sole rights to her affection. Reginald has informed me this morning that he intends to prolong his stay indefinitely at Churchill.

(Lights up on the Garden, Reginald approaches Frederica)

Reginald: Do I disturb you?

Frederica: Not at all, Mr. De Courcy. I was just looking at some of these books.

Reginald: I see. You put us all to shame with your constancy of study.

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Frederica: Oh, no. It is surely the reverse. The excellent library here is filled with such wonderful volumes, it's hard to know what to read next. I have been so little in the world, every source of knowledge is of interest to me.

Reginald: The study of history is a particularly important source of information--both for improving an understanding of the world and of ourselves.

Frederica: Ourselves? How is that, Mr. De Courcy?

Reginald: Well, with careful reflection, one is less likely to . . . repeat errors in judgment on matters essential to happiness.

Frederica: Errors in judgment?

Reginald: Quite.

Frederica: But perhaps too much reflection may be considered . . . unsafe?

Reginald: (Laughs) Indeed. (He sits next to her) Miss Vernon, would you allow me to choose a volume for you from the library?

Frederica: Oh, yes. I mean, if it is not too much trouble.

Reginald: It would be a very great pleasure.

Frederica: I look forward to it.

Catherine: (Finishing the letter) Rest easy, Mother. There is now no doubt in my mind that our hopes of a sincere attachment will soon be rewarded. Whether Lady Susan is happy in her second choice, we may never know--for who could trust her assurance of it? She has nothing against her but her husband and her conscience. Poor Sir James seems to have drawn a harder lot

than mere folly merited. For myself, I confess that I can pity only Maria Manwaring, who was defrauded her due by a woman ten years her senior who will never be anything more than a most distinguished flirt!

(Lights down on Parlour, Lights fade in the Garden on the two lovers)

END OF PLAY