

Jane Austen's

Love & Friendship

-or-

The Spirit of Jealousy & Perversity of Malice

Adapted from her unfinished Novella

By Whit Stillman

Concerning the beautiful Lady Susan Vernon,

Her Loves and Friendships,

And the strange Antagonism of the DeCourcy family.

Partially Conformed Shooting Script
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71 Dame Street, Dublin

Dramatis Personae

Lady Susan Vernon, a beautiful young widow -- appears not “more than five & twenty”

Mrs. Alicia Johnson, Lady Susan’s good friend

Mr. Johnson, Alicia’s older husband to whom “the great word Respectable” applies.

Lord Manwaring, a divinely attractive man

Lady Lucy Manwaring, his wealthy wife; formerly Mr. Johnson’s ward

Miss Maria Manwaring, Lord Manwaring’s eligible younger sister

Miss Frederica Susanna Vernon, a school girl; Lady Susan’s daughter

Mrs. Catherine Vernon (nee DeCourcy), Lady Susan’s sister-in-law

Mr. Reginald DeCourcy, Catherine’s young & handsome brother

Mr. Charles Vernon, her obliging husband & brother of the late Lord Vernon

Maud, Catherine’s maid

Wilson, a servant at Churchill

Sir Reginald DeCourcy, Catherine & Reginald’s elderly father

Lady. DeCourcy, their mother

Sir James Martin, wealthy young suitor of Frederica Vernon & Maria Manwaring, a bit of a “Rattle.”

Mrs. Cross, Lady Susan’s impoverished friend and aide

Locales

Langford -- Lord and Lady Manwaring’s estate

Churchill -- Charles and Catherine Vernon’s estate, in Sussex

Parklands -- the DeCourcy family seat, in Kent

Hurst & Wilford – inn & coaching station near Churchill

Edward Street, London -- the Johnsons’ townhouse

Upper Seymour Street, London -- Lady Susan’s rooms

A Note on Period

The events occur in the latter 1790s. The fashions could either be the attractive traditional ones from the first part of the decade or the striking neo-classical “Directoire” style which came in with the French Directory, the transitional regime that marked the ascension of the Napoleonic Era.

Music and a local “Assembly” dancing sequence have not yet been indicated for this draft. The music of the period was especially brilliant and perhaps could be used similarly to the classical score for “Barry Lyndon.”

A Note on Tone

Rather than romantic Austen of the "Sense & Sensibility" sort, this would be more comic Austen somewhat akin to the Oscar Wilde adaptations – though still with lush locations, costumes and even some weddings. The protagonist is Lady Susan Vernon, beautiful & charming, the romantic puppet master who seeks (usually successfully) to manipulate all around her. Though not a conventional heroine, played with the right style & charm we hope she might be compelling as well as funny. The period is closer to that of "Dangerous Liaisons" than Austen's later novels.

Catherine Vernon describes Lady Susan

“She is really excessively pretty... I have seldom seen so lovely a Woman as Lady Susan. She is delicately fair, with fine grey eyes & dark eyelashes; & from her appearance one would not suppose her more than five & twenty... I cannot help feeling that she possesses an uncommon union of Symmetry, Brilliancy, & Grace. Her address to me was so gentle, frank, & even 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... Her Countenance is absolutely sweet, & her voice & manner winningly mild. I am sorry it is so, for what is this but Deceit?”

TITLE CARD: 'November - Langford'

EXT. PANORAMA, LANGFORD

Dramatic baroque music. Diagonal crane shot of Langford, an elegant country residence. Liveried footman carry trunks to an impressive carriage. *

REGINALD (V.O.)
(Wistfully sententious)
Langford, Langford! If only it
hadn't been for Langford - how
happy we might have been!

The sound of a sob, a fashionable young woman, MISS MARIA MANWARING, runs into frame heading to the house, crying. Her elder brother, LORD MANWARING -- an impressive figure - exits as she enters, pursued by a thin, haggard yet rather young woman -- LADY LUCY MANWARING, his wife.

LUCY MANWARING
Manwaring! Manwaring! Don't turn
your back to me! Please! I can't
bear it!

Manwaring approaches a stunningly beautiful woman accompanied by a drably cloaked girl, her face hidden in the shadow of her hood. Manwaring and a servant help the two into a carriage.

An idiotic young fop, SIR JAMES MARTIN, hurries into frame.

SIR JAMES
Lady Susan! Frederica! Wait! I beg
you...

As Sir James nears the carriage it pulls out; he's left in the drive, lace kerchief to face, watching them go.

Title card: 'Churchill'

INT. BLUE ROOM, CHURCHILL -- DAY

A footman lights candles as an attractive young woman, MRS. CATHERINE VERNON writes at her desk. CHARLES VERNON, her husband, approaches as the footman leaves.

CHARLES (O.S.)
Catherine, a letter--

Charles enters with a letter. He is calm and bland; he sits.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
 --it seems Lady Susan will finally
 visit...

REGINALD DECOURCY, Catherine's brother, enters in riding
 clothes as if about to head out for a jaunt.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
 In fact she's already on her way.

CATHERINE
 What?

He gives her the letter which she starts to read.

REGINALD
 Lady Susan Vernon?

Catherine nods.

REGINALD (CONT'D)
 Congratulations on being about to
 receive the most accomplished flirt
 in all England!

CHARLES
 You misjudge her, Reginald.

REGINALD
 How so?

CHARLES
 Like many women of beauty and
 distinction our sister-in-law has
 been a victim of the spirit of
 jealousy in our land.

CATHERINE
 It's jealousy?

CHARLES
 Yes. Like anyone, Susan might be
 capable of an action or remark open
 to misconstruction but I cannot but
 admire the fortitude with which she
 has supported grave misfortunes.

REGINALD
 Excuse me -- I spoke out of turn.

Catherine's look is that he did not speak out of turn; dogs
 bark outside; Charles leaves.

CATHERINE

Why would Lady Susan, who was so well settled at Langford, suddenly want to visit us?

REGINALD

What reason does she give?

CATHERINE

(reading)

Her "anxiety to meet" me and to "know the children." These have never concerned her before.

Reginald finishes pulling on his riding gloves, a reflective look on his face as if anticipating the meeting.

TITLE CARD: 'Edward Street, London'

INT. EDWARD STREET HOUSE -- DAY

ALICIA JOHNSON, a pretty woman of fashion, floats down the hall as a doorbell sounds. A servant opens the front door, revealing LADY SUSAN, the beautiful young woman glimpsed earlier. Alicia hurries her inside.

ALICIA

Susan! Come - hurry.

SUSAN

My dear, such haste! How curious you are.

ALICIA

Mr. Johnson's carriage is about to come into the street...

SUSAN

(laughs)

Surely that must happen often...

ALICIA

You didn't receive my letter?

SUSAN

Letter?

ALICIA

Mr. Johnson forbids my seeing you.

SUSAN

Preposterous! How can he "forbid?"

ALICIA

By threatening the severest
punishment imaginable -- sending me
back to Connecticut.

SUSAN

To be tarred-and-feathered?

ALICIA

He now claims to have important
business at Hartford and threatens
to settle there if our connection
is not entirely severed.

SUSAN

For what possible reason or
pretext?

ALICIA

His former ward, Lucy Manwaring,
wrote to him.

SUSAN

Did she?

Alicia slips Lucy Manwaring's letter from the desk drawer and
hands it to Susan as they both sit.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

A horrid woman!

ALICIA

I know.

SUSAN

Deranged. If she were going to be
jealous she should not have married
such a charming man! I recall
thinking as I approached Langford:
(dramatically)
"I like this Man; pray Heaven no
harm come of it!" I was determined
to be discreet and I have been --
admitting no one's attentions but
Manwaring's, avoiding general
flirtation entirely... Except for a
little notice bestowed on Sir James
Martin. But if the world knew my
motive there it would honor me!

ALICIA

Martin?

SUSAN

Sir James Martin, of Martindale.
Vastly rich and rather simple.

ALICIA

Ideal.

SUSAN

Miss Maria Manwaring had set her cap for him, considering such an income too large not to be shared. But with a little notice I detached him and soon had him in love with Frederica. If my daughter were not the greatest simpleton on earth she'd be engaged to him now!

ALICIA

What?

SUSAN

She refused him! A baronet with ten thousand a year. It's all so provoking.

ALICIA

But where will you live?

SUSAN

Were there another place open to me, I would crawl there on my knees: the worst spot this side of the ocean, a Country Village: Churchill, my brother-in-law's seat. Mrs. Cross, a gentlewoman in straitened circumstances who will come as my companion -- to pack, unpack, that sort of thing. As there's an element of friendship involved I'm sure the paying of wages would be offensive to us both...

EXT. A COUNTRY ROAD -- DAY.

Lady Susan, beautiful in travelling clothes, rides a carriage accompanied by her companion, MRS. CROSS:

SUSAN

...My brother-in-law, Charles Vernon, is very rich.

(MORE)

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Once a man gets his name on a Banking House he rolls in money -- so it is not very rational for his lady to begrudge the sums he has advanced me.

MRS. CROSS

Decidedly irrational, not rational at all.

SUSAN

I have no money -- and no husband -- -- but in one's plight they say is one's opportunity. Not that I would ever want to think in opportunistic terms...

MRS. CROSS

Certainly not. Never.

The COACHMAN turns to them and shouts:

COACHMAN

Churchill, coming into view, your Ladyship.

Lady Susan looks to the distance. An impressive ancient castle appears from behind the greenery:

SUSAN

Heavens... What a bore.

MRS. CROSS

Yes, decidedly boring.

EXT. CHURCHILL -- DAY

Crane shot as the carriage pulls into the drive before "Churchill," as Charles and the young children descend the steps to greet them. Footmen help the ladies from the carriage; Lady Susan pays particular attention to little Frederick.

INT. CHURCHILL, MAIN HALL -- DAY

The butler, WILSON, exasperated, leads a footman across the hall:

WILSON

Mrs. Cross is a friend of Lady Susan and should be in the adjoining room.

INT. CHURCHILL, SUSAN'S ROOMS -- DAY

Lady Susan enters as Mrs. Cross unpacks her trunk.

SUSAN

I have no reason to complain of Mr. Vernon's reception but I'm not entirely satisfied with his lady's.

MRS. CROSS

No?

SUSAN

She's perfectly well-bred, surprisingly so, but her manner doesn't persuade me that she's disposed in my favour.

A sympathetic look of agreement from Mrs. Cross.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

As you might have noticed I sought to be as amiable as possible--

MRS. CROSS

Exceptionally amiable. In fact entirely charming -- excuse me for saying so--

SUSAN

Not at all -- it's true. I wanted her to be delighted with me--
(disappointed)
--but I didn't succeed.

MRS. CROSS

I can't understand it.

Susan, thoughtful, recalls:

SUSAN

It's true I have always detested her. And that, before her marriage, I went to great lengths to prevent it. Yet it shows an illiberal spirit to resent for long a plan which didn't succeed.

MRS. CROSS

Decidedly illiberal. Not liberal at all!

SUSAN

My opposing her marriage -- and later preventing her and Charles from buying Vernon Castle -- might have given her an unfavorable impression. But I've found that, where there's a disposition to dislike, a pretext will soon be found.

MRS. CROSS

You mustn't reproach yourself--

SUSAN

I shan't -- the past is done. My project will be the children. I know a couple of their names already and have decided to attach myself to young Frederick in particular, taking him on my lap and sighing over him for his dear Uncle's sake--

A knock on the door.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Come in.

Wilson enters.

WILSON

Mrs. Vernon's compliments, your ladyship. She asks if you and Mrs. Cross would join her for tea?

SUSAN

With pleasure--

She exchanges a look with Mrs. Cross.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Mrs. Cross would prefer her repose but thank Mrs. Vernon -- I will join her directly.

INT. GOLD ROOM -- DAY

A footman crosses out while Catherine checks the tea setting; the sounds of children come from off-screen.

SUSAN (O.S.)
 Yes, Frederick, I see you have
 quite an appetite: you will grow
 tall and handsome like your uncle --
 and father.

LITTLE CHARLOTTE VERNON (O.S.)
 Frederick, be good...

Catherine smiles and approaches them.

LITTLE CHARLOTTE VERNON (O.S.)
 (CONT'D)
 Frederick, don't touch that!

CATHERINE
 Frederick, be careful.

The off-screen clatter of metal objects.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
 I'm so sorry!

From off, Susan laughs, then enters with a gash of red jam on
 her dress.

SUSAN
 Not at all. Such a family
 resemblance -- it rather moves me.

CATHERINE
 You'll want to change.

Susan covers the mark with a napkin and smoothly sits.

SUSAN
 Oh no -- let's have our tea while
 it's warm. Mrs. Cross is a genius
 with fabrics.

Catherine serves the tea. Susan takes her cup.

CATHERINE
 Are you sure?

SUSAN
 Oh yes! How much Frederick reminds
 me of his dear uncle!

CATHERINE
 You think there's a resemblance?

SUSAN
 Yes, remarkable -- the eyes...

Catherine considers this:

CATHERINE

Weren't Frederick Vernon's eyes
brown?

SUSAN

(using her hand)
I refer to the shape and slope of
the brow...

CATHERINE

Oh.

SUSAN

I must thank you for this visit --
I'm afraid the short notice must
have come as a surprise.

CATHERINE

Only because I understood you to be
so happily settled at Langford.

SUSAN

It's true -- Lady Manwaring and her
husband made me feel welcome. But
their sunny dispositions led them
often into society. I might have
tolerated such a life at one time
but the loss of a husband such as
Mr. Vernon is not borne easily. To
stay with you here, at your
charming retirement--
(she looks around)
--became my fondest wish...

CATHERINE

I was glad to have the chance to
meet.

SUSAN

Might I confide something?

Catherine nods.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Langford was not ideal for my
daughter. Her education has been
neglected, for which I fault myself
-- Mr. Vernon's illness prevented
my paying her the attention both
duty and affection required.

(MORE)

SUSAN (CONT'D)

I have therefore placed her at the excellent school Miss Summers keeps.

CATHERINE

I trust Frederica will visit soon.

SUSAN

A visit, as delightful as that might be, would represent so many days and hours deducted from the "Grand Affair of Education." And I'm afraid Frederica can't afford such deductions.

CATHERINE

But she'll come for Christmas--

SUSAN

Alas, no: Miss Summers can only give her the concentrated attention she needs then.

Susan puts down her cup and glances at the jam stain.

CATHERINE

I'm so sorry--

SUSAN

Not at all! If you'll excuse me I'll give it to Mrs. Cross who, once rested, craves activity.

She gets up.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Once she's applied her genius to it all trace of little Frederick's interesting design will disappear!

Susan leaves; Catherine is left, looking pensive.

INT. LADY SUSAN'S ROOMS, CHURCHILL -- DAY

While Mrs. Cross works on the dress stain, Lady Susan reads correspondence:

SUSAN

The fees at Frederica's school are far too high to even think of paying! So, in a sense, it's an economy...

EXT. CHURCHILL FORECOURT -- LATE AFTERNOON

Reginald arrives at a trot and dismounts, his horse held by a retainer. Removing his gloves he bounds up the front steps.

INT. HALLWAY TO GOLD ROOM, CHURCHILL -- LATE AFTERNOON/EARLY EVENING

Catherine with Reginald as he shakes off the cold; servants light candles.

REGINALD

...I confess to curiosity to know this lady and see first-hand her bewitching powers. Is she as beautiful as they say?

CATHERINE

You worry me, Reginald.

REGINALD

Don't. I understand Lady Susan possesses a degree of captivating deceit which might be pleasing to detect.

CATHERINE

You truly worry me.

SUSAN (O.S.)

Good evening!

Lady Susan and Mrs. Cross enter from the garden or hallway, weather dependent. Reginald and Catherine are struck momentarily silent.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

What charming expressions!

Catherine recovers first:

CATHERINE

Susan, let me introduce my brother, Reginald DeCourcy. Reginald, may I present Frederick Vernon's widow, Lady Susan, and her friend, Mrs. Cross.

After a polite nod to Mrs. Cross, Reginald addresses Susan:

REGINALD

Delighted to make your
acquaintance: Your renown precedes
you.

SUSAN

(long pause; coolly)
I'm afraid the allusion escapes me.

REGINALD

Your reputation as an ornament to
our Society...

Susan pauses a moment to collect her thoughts.

SUSAN

What you say surprises me. Since
the great sadness of my husband's
death I have lived in nearly
perfect isolation. To better know
his family, and further remove
myself from Society, I came to
Churchill -- not to make new
acquaintance of a frivolous sort.
But of course I'm pleased to know
my sister's relations...

MONTAGE with period music -- First, beautiful wide landscape
view; Lady Susan and Reginald walk their horses after a ride;
then another time they walk in the garden. And are observed
doing so: Mrs. Cross pauses from attending to Susan's
wardrobe to look down upon them in the garden.

INT. CHURCHILL, SUSAN'S ROOMS -- DAY

Susan who returns in outdoor clothes pulling off her gloves.
Mrs. Cross -- still pleased to take care of Lady Susan's
rooms and wardrobe -- warmly greets her.

MRS. CROSS

I take it you are finding Mr.
DeCourcy's society more agreeable?

Susan doesn't disagree -- thinking...

SUSAN

To some degree... At first his
conversation betrayed a sauciness
and familiarity which is my
aversion -- but since I've found a
quality of callow idealism which
rather interests me.

(MORE)

SUSAN (CONT'D)

When I've inspired him with a greater respect than his sister's kind offices have allowed he might in fact be an agreeable flirt.

MRS. CROSS

He's handsome, isn't he?

Susan considers.

SUSAN

Yes. In a calf-like way -- not like Manwaring, of course. But there's a certain pleasure in making a person, pre-determined to dislike, instead acknowledge one's superiority. How delightful it will be to humble the pride of these pompous DeCourcys!

CARD: "Parklands, ancestral estate of the DeCourcy family"

INT. PARKLANDS -- DAY

The distinguished Sir Reginald DeCourcy walks through the impressive halls a letter in his hand.

INT. PARKLANDS, MORNING ROOM -- DAY

Lady DeCourcy, mother of Catherine and Reginald, takes tea on the sofa, as Sir Reginald enters.

SIR REGINALD

A letter for you, my dear.

LADY DECOURCY

A letter?

SIR REGINALD

From Catherine.

LADY DECOURCY

I hope she'll arrive soon.

Lady DeCourcy takes the letter from him; she has the sniffles from a cold.

LADY DECOURCY (CONT'D)

The season's cheerless without the children.

Having trouble reading the letter, she puts it aside.

LADY DECOURCY (CONT'D)
I'm afraid this cold has affected
my eyes.

SIR REGINALD
Save your eyes, my dear - I'll read
for you.

LADY DECOURCY
No, that's all right--

SIR REGINALD
I insist.

Sir Reginald starts to read a moment to himself, then aloud.

SIR REGINALD (CONT'D)
Alright, now let's see--
(reading & paraphrasing)
Catherine hopes you are well...
She asks most particularly that you
give me her love.

He looks to her expectantly.

LADY DECOURCY
Yes, and..?

Sir Reginald continues reading, mumbling a bit as he does.

SIR REGINALD
Reginald's decided to stay at
Churchill to hunt with Charles. He
cites the "fine open weather..."

He looks out the window.

SIR REGINALD (CONT'D)
What nonsense. The weather's not
open at all!

LADY DECOURCY
Maybe it is there, or was when she
wrote.
(sweetly)
My dear, could you just read?

SIR REGINALD
Verbatim?

LADY DECOURCY
Yes, the words - some of
Catherine's voice will be in them.

SIR REGINALD

I'll read each word, comma and dash if that's what you wish. Here: "I grow deeply uneasy (comma) my dearest Mother (comma) about Reginald (comma) from witnessing the very rapid increase of her influence (semi-colon)--

LADY DECOURCY

Just the words, please.

SIR REGINALD

No punctuation at all? All right, much easier: "He and Lady Susan are now on terms of the most particular friendship, frequently engaged in long conversations together." Lady Susan?

LADY DECOURCY

Yes Lady Susan has been visiting Churchill.

SIR REGINALD

Lady Susan Vernon?!

LADY DECOURCY

Yes.

SIR REGINALD

How could Reginald engage in conversations with Lady Susan Vernon? Conversations which are... "long." What would they talk about?

LADY DECOURCY

My eyes have definitely cleared -- I'll read it myself. Don't trouble yourself...

SIR REGINALD

No, no, if my son and heir is involved with such a lady I must trouble myself:

(reading)

"How sincerely do I grieve she ever entered this house! Her power over him is boundless: She has not only entirely effaced his former ill-opinion but persuaded him to justify her conduct in the most passionate of terms..."

Sir Reginald puts down the letter.

SIR REGINALD (CONT'D)
Well I must go--

LADY DECOURCY
No - I'll write--

SIR REGINALD
No, no, if this is happening,
there's no time.

Sir Reginald heads off to prepare.

EXT. HURST & WILFORD -- DAY

Reginald rides on horseback and dismounts at the tavern and coaching station.

INT. MAIN ROOM, HURST & WILFORD -- DAY.

Reginald enters. His father warms himself by the fire.

REGINALD
Father!

SIR REGINALD
Good afternoon.

REGINALD
How extraordinary for you to be
here...

Sir Reginald stands by the fire, very reserved.

REGINALD (CONT'D)
You are in good health, I trust?
How is Mother?

Sir Reginald continues silently by the fire.

REGINALD (CONT'D)
What brings you here?

SIR REGINALD
I won't dissemble and say I have
business in this district -- what
I've come about is more important.

REGINALD
What's of such importance?

SIR REGINALD

I know young men don't admit inquiry into affairs of the heart. But, as the sole son of an ancient family, you must know that your conduct is most important to us -- your happiness, ours, the credit of our family name, its very survival--

REGINALD

But Father--

SIR REGINALD

No, no, hear me out. I know you would not deliberately form an engagement without informing us but I cannot help fear that you'll fall into an obligation which everyone near you must oppose.

REGINALD

What do you mean, Sir?

SIR REGINALD

Lady Susan Vernon's age alone--

REGINALD

Father, you astonish me!

SIR REGINALD

What surprises you?

REGINALD

Imputing such ambitions to Lady Susan! She'd never think of such a thing; even her enemies grant her excellent understanding. My sole interest has been to enjoy the lively conversation of a superior lady. But Catherine's prejudice is so great--

SIR REGINALD

Prejudice? Lady Susan's neglect of her late husband, her extravagance and dissipation, her encouragement of other men, were so notorious--

REGINALD

These are vile calumnies -- I could explain each but will not so dignify them. I know you spend little time in Society--

SIR REGINALD

None.

REGINALD

Should you have frequented it more you'd know the astonishing degree of vile, hateful jealousy in our country--

SIR REGINALD

Do not deprecate our country, Sir! I can't prevent your inheriting the family estate and my ability to distress you during my life is not the kind of revenge that I would choose to take--

REGINALD

Father, this is unnecessary--

SIR REGINALD

No, no, let me continue. A permanent connection between you and Lady Susan Vernon would destroy every comfort of our lives: It would be the death of the honest pride with which we've always considered you-- we'd blush to see you, to hear of you, to think of you.

REGINALD

Father, with the utmost humility let me say that what you imagine is... impossible.

INT. CHURCHILL, STAIRS -- DAY

A somber Mrs. Cross follows two footmen carrying her trunk down the stairs. Lady Susan follows the group, a pleasant expression on her face.

INT./EXT. CHURCHILL, FORECOURT, FRONT STEPS & HALL -- DAY

Lady Susan watches from a window as the footmen help Mrs. Cross and her trunk into the carriage. Charles Vernon, morning post in hand, joins her to watch the carriage depart.

SUSAN

Poor Mrs. Cross was obliged to accept a position in Buckinghamshire.

(MORE)

SUSAN (CONT'D)

As there was an element of friendship between us I realized the paying of wages would be offensive to us both.

CHARLES

You value friendship highly.

SUSAN

Yes. I hope I was of some help to her.

Charles, separating one letter from the others:

CHARLES

Your friends don't neglect you.

Some distance away Reginald pretends to be reading a book of Cowper's poems but his attention is all on Susan as she takes the letter expectantly.

SUSAN

Thank you, Charles.

Looking at the envelope.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Oh, it's from Frederica's school...

As Charles moves off she finds a letter opener, slits open the envelope and begins to read; her face falls.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

No...!

Agitated she sits and continues to read - Reginald goes to her.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

I can't believe it! It... defies comprehension!

REGINALD

What?

SUSAN

Frederica has run away!...
Run away from school!

REGINALD

Heavens -- where to?

SUSAN

They don't know.

REGINALD

She's lost?!

SUSAN

No -- they detected her plan early enough to intercept her. But what folly! Where could she have thought of going?

REGINALD

Surely, here.

SUSAN

No, this is the last place she'd come; I mean, rather--

REGINALD

But she must miss you terribly--

SUSAN

Certainly -- I just don't think Churchill would be her object.

Susan continues reading the letter -- then reacts:

SUSAN (CONT'D)

This is outrageous! Miss Summers requires that Frederica be removed from school!... No! This will not stand!... Perhaps Miss Summers is under the impression that, as a widow without fortune, I may be bullied. She's evidently forgotten: Frederica is a Vernon!

Lady Susan stands and looks out the window in agitated thought.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Charles must put this right: Confronted with his imposing worth, even the mistress of a school must be persuaded to act rightly.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD -- DAY

Charles and Lady Susan in a carriage heading for London.

INT./EXT. STATELY ARCADE -- DAY

Lady Susan walks with Alicia Johnson in the elegant setting.

SUSAN

I had no notion of Frederica being so contrary -- she seemed all Vernon milkiness -- but it confirms the rightness of my plan. Did Sir James call?

ALICIA

Several times.

SUSAN

Excellent!

ALICIA

I followed your instructions, scolding him roundly for making love to Maria Manwaring -- he protested that it had only been in joke! You are right: he's wonderfully silly.

In view across the courtyard an ARISTOCRATIC MAN followed by a footman has noticed the ladies and slowly approaches them. They continue walking, Susan reflecting:

SUSAN

But we can't let Sir James forget with whom he's in love -- a man so rich and foolish will not remain single long.

ALICIA

Sir James is so far from having forgotten the Vernons I'm sure he would marry either of you in an instant...

Susan smiles and nods, a non-verbal "thank you."

SUSAN

I must go back to Churchill -- but I might need your help finding another school should Miss Summers not take her back. Under no circumstance will I have her at Churchill.

ALICIA

Very wise...

SUSAN

What do you mean?

ALICIA
The nearness of their ages...

Susan looks confused.

ALICIA (CONT'D)
Her and Reginald's...

As the implication dawns Susan is displeased.

SUSAN
How unkind...

ALICIA
Forgive me!

SUSAN
(suddenly sunny)
Forgiven! The Fallacy of Youth!
Isn't it rather clear we, women of
decision, who hold the trumps!

ARISTOCRATIC MAN
Lady Susan? Lady Susan Vernon?

Lady Susan turns, slow-basting the man with a scathing look:

SUSAN
How dare you address me, Sir!

The ARISTOCRATIC MAN looks stunned.

ARISTOCRATIC MAN
But Lady Susan--

SUSAN
Be gone, Sir! Or I will have you
whipped!

The man turns and slinks away shame-faced.

ALICIA
Outrageous! You had never seen him
before?

SUSAN
Oh, no, I know him well. I would
never speak to a stranger that way.

Alicia considers this and nods.

EXT. A COUNTRY ROAD -- DAY

Lady Susan in a carriage returning from London on her own.
Music plays.

EXT. CHURCHILL -- DAY

A beautiful establishing shot.

EXT. CHURCHILL, GARDENS -- DAY

Reginald and Lady Susan walk in the gardens:

SUSAN

I hope that you might soon know my friend Alicia -- she's an American, from the Connecticut branch of the Delancey family. Although even the best-bred Americans don't sound particularly "fine," there's a freshness to her manners which I find rather tonic. Her family were treated outrageously there in the late war, punished for their very loyalty to the Crown. Americans have shown themselves to be a nation of ingrates -- only having children can one begin to understand such a dynamic.

REGINALD

Yes.

INT. CHURCHILL, GROUND FLOOR ROOMS -- DAY

Catherine Vernon, carrying an envelope, searches the rooms, finally finding whom she seeks entering the Gold Room from the garden direction.

CATHERINE

Susan, I've been looking for you -- the afternoon coach brought this note. Perhaps Charles has succeeded with Miss Summers...

Susan opens the note and reads a few lines.

SUSAN

Oh it's as I feared! Miss Summers refuses to keep Frederica -- she says she must think of her school's reputation--

REGINALD

Preposterous! I never heard of her school!

The sound of arrivals come from the front of the house.

INT. CHURCHILL, HALLWAY -- DAY

Charles Vernon accompanied by a shy girl of eighteen approaches.

INT. CHURCHILL, GOLD ROOM -- DAY

The group notices the sound.

REGINALD

Could that be them?

SUSAN

What, Frederica? Here?

Charles and Frederica appear in their travelling clothes. Frederica is young, quietly attractive, and terrified.

CHARLES

Hullo, hullo. Well, here we are...

CATHERINE

Is this Frederica?

CHARLES

Yes, allow me to introduce our niece -- charming girl -- Miss Frederica Vernon.

CATHERINE

Welcome, Frederica! We've longed to know you.... My brother, Reginald DeCourcy.

REGINALD

Hullo. Pleased to meet you.

Frederica bows to all but finally is left facing her mother.

SUSAN

Good afternoon, Frederica.

FREDERICA

(voice breaking)
Good afternoon, Mother.

Looking at her mother Frederica bursts into tears and runs from the room.

SUSAN

Excuse me. It's as I feared -- I must go to my daughter.

Susan leaves.

REGINALD

What was that? Extraordinary.

CATHERINE

Poor Frederica.

REGINALD

Poor mother of Frederica!

CATHERINE

What?

REGINALD

The daughter is, I understand, a problem case.

CATHERINE

I only saw fear.

CHARLES

She hasn't had tea. It could be lack of nourishment.

EXT. CHURCHILL, GARDENS -- DAY

Susan and Reginald walk on a garden path; he looks around:

REGINALD

Where is Frederica?

SUSAN

In our rooms practicing the pianoforte.

REGINALD

She practices quietly.

They both listen for the notes -- Susan glances quickly back.

SUSAN

Don't look -- Frederica's watching us.

REGINALD
Watching us?

SUSAN
Yes, at the window -- don't look.

REGINALD
How odd. To be spied upon.

SUSAN
(laughs)
That's the parent's lot. We bring these delightful creatures into the world -- eagerly, happily -- but before long they are spying upon and judging us -- rarely favorably. Having children is our fondest wish -- but, in doing so, we breed our acutest critics. A preposterous situation -- but entirely of our own making.

She laughs.

REGINALD
I marvel at your good humor.

SUSAN
What alternative have we? It's the way of the world. We must accept it with a smile.
(she smiles)
Of course when the little ones are very small there's a kind of sweetness which partially compensates for the dreadfulness which comes after...

REGINALD
You worry for Frederica's future?

SUSAN
I worry for her present:
(laughs)
Frederica's neither pretty nor accomplished, with no conversation-- I say this with a mother's love,
(sincerely, moved)
accepting that the responsibility for securing her future rests with me...

She looks to Reginald with a sincere, candid expression which he returns.

INT. CHURCHILL, DRAWING ROOM -- DAY

Catherine and Reginald are together.

CATHERINE

She's quite prettier than I ever imagined.

REGINALD

Pretty? You think so?

CATHERINE

Yes. You don't?

REGINALD

No. I'd not have said that. In any case, beauty matters little; it's vivacity and a lively intelligence one looks for -- even from the young.

A commotion can be heard outside, Catherine heads toward the door but as she does a distraught Frederica bursts in.

FREDERICA

Oh, I'm sorry. Excuse me--

Embarrassed to find Reginald there, she stops.

FREDERICA (CONT'D)

I beg your pardon.

CATHERINE

What is it, my dear?

FREDERICA

He's here! He's come! Sir James is here!

CATHERINE

Who?

FREDERICA

Excuse me. I'm sorry--

Frederica leaves, hurrying to her room; a subdued Susan enters with Sir James Martin.

SIR JAMES

So sorry to come like this.

(laughs)

I suppose you didn't expect me.

(laughs)

Lady Susan is not amused; she proceeds crisply.

SUSAN

Catherine, let me introduce Sir James Martin. Sir James, my sister in law, Mrs. Catherine Vernon and her brother, Mr. Reginald DeCourcy.

SIR JAMES

Hullo.

THE OTHERS

How do you do?

Sir James, surprised by the question, takes a moment to consider it:

SIR JAMES

Kind of you to ask: Excellent. Truly very well, thank you... Excuse my hurry in coming -- the lack of notice beforehand, et cetera, et cetera...

(laughs)

Truth is, I forgot to write -- then it was too late. Now I'm here...

(laughs)

Took the liberty of a relation, hoping soon to be one.

He nods in the direction Frederica, laughs; the others are silent. Sir James turns to Lady Susan.

SIR JAMES (CONT'D)

I must say, you looked surprised.

(laughs)

You were astonished to see me. No? Not? Well, that's how it looked.

(laughs)

SUSAN

Yes, I was astonished -- and still am.

SIR JAMES

(to Reginald)

An impressive establishment you have here, Sir. My congratulations. Immaculate.

SUSAN

Mr. DeCourcy is Mrs. Vernon's brother--

SIR JAMES

Very good!

SUSAN

--it's her husband, Mr. Vernon, who has Churchill.

SIR JAMES

Churchill? That's how you say it? All-together that way:

(very, very quickly)

"Churchill."

(marvelling)

That explains a great deal. I had heard "church" ...and "hill" -- but I couldn't find either. All I saw was a big house.

(laughs)

Fine name: "Churchill."

Marlborough, right? The general. He showed the French!

(laughs; to Catherine)

You must be very proud.

REGINALD

No connection.

SIR JAMES

But I believe I've heard it spoken of.

(to Susan)

I think you mentioned it -- "Churchill" -- yes, I believe you did but what I heard was "church" and "hill." Couldn't find them at all! Now I realize I was in mistake but stand corrected. Happens quite a lot.

Sir James lets loose a long and very silly laugh. When it ends Susan continues:

SUSAN

Reginald, would you be so kind as to take Sir James to see Charles? Sir James, you'll find Charles well versed in the advanced agricultural methods in which you've taken such an interest.

Sir James thinks.

SIR JAMES

Oh yes! Advanced agricultural methods -- very much so. Collins, who supervises Martindale for me, speaks of them often... The landowner of the present day... must know all sorts of things -- that's our role.

(laughs)

"Hullo, Collins" -- I say -- "what advanced methods have we today?"
Excellent!

For a moment the others just regard Sir James with surprise.

INT. CHURCHILL, SUSAN'S ROOMS -- LATE PM

Susan enters and tries to find her way in a darkened space, revealed to be a bedroom suite.

SUSAN

...Oh, there you are! Were you asleep?

FREDERICA

No, Mama.

SUSAN

What then? You were hiding from me?... Please explain.

FREDERICA

No.

SUSAN

You're a strange girl. What were you up to back there?

FREDERICA

What?

SUSAN

Rushing out before Sir James entered the room.

FREDERICA

I couldn't bear to see him.

SUSAN

"Couldn't bear?" What an ungenerous manner of speech!

Frederica doesn't move or respond.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Frederica dear, Sir James Martin is a kind-hearted young man whose only offense seems to be

(with a sweet smile)

wanting to provide you a life of comfort.

She waits for a response but there is none.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Have you nothing to say?

Frederica shakes her head.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Dear, our present comfortable state is of the most precarious sort. We don't live -- we visit. We are entirely at the mercy of our friends and relations -- as we discovered so painfully at Langford. Here you seem to have won your aunt's affection:

(smiles again)

I think I served you well there, for I believe she would do anything to spite me. But such a dynamic cannot continue forever.

FREDERICA

But, Mama--

SUSAN

"But, Mama?" I will not always be here for you to contradict me. If the life of comfort Sir James offers you is not to your taste, what will you do? How will you live?

FREDERICA

I could... teach.

SUSAN

Teach! Had you been more in school you would not consider such a thing! Answer this: When our Lord wrote His Commandments, which one did he consider so important he put it in the fourth position?

FREDERICA

The fourth position?

SUSAN

Yes, the Fourth Commandment.

FREDERICA

I know the Commandments -- but not their order.

SUSAN

That's what comes of an irregular education! The Fourth Commandment...

FREDERICA

"Thou shalt not...?"

SUSAN

It's not a "Shalt not." It's a "Shalt."

FREDERICA

"Thou shalt?"

SUSAN

Had I not myself been present I would wonder if you were actually my daughter:

(pause, compassionate
look)

"Honor. Thy. Father. And. Mother."

FREDERICA

I'm sorry! Has anything I've done dishonored you or Father?

SUSAN

To "honor" means, among other things, to listen with respect to a parent's sincere counsel.

FREDERICA

But I do listen with respect, Mama. It's just that--

SUSAN

If you will not pay attention to me perhaps you will to a larger imperative: the Law of the Universe. An offer as splendid as Sir James' is unlikely to come again. He has offered you the one thing of value he has to give -- his income.

(MORE)

SUSAN (CONT'D)

I fear, and reproach myself, for having shielded you for far too long: had I let you starve a little bit more, you would resist much less.

FREDERICA

But at school I was often hungry--

SUSAN

Evidently not hungry enough! In any case the starvation of the schoolhouse is nothing like that of the destitute. Is that what you want?

FREDERICA

No... I can see that Sir James is a kind man and if it were not a question of marriage I could like him. But marriage is for one's whole life--

SUSAN

Not in my experience. Meanwhile I must ask you not to speak to your aunt or uncle about this matter -- or seek their interference in any way. I insist -- promise... Remember the Commandment.

FREDERICA

Yes, Mama.

EXT. GARDEN -- DAY

Susan and Catherine walk.

SUSAN

Sir James's arrival, and its suddenness, requires some explanation. You were not too surprised, I hope?

CATHERINE

It was unexpected--

SUSAN

Yes; certainly. To me, as much as anyone. I'm afraid Sir James' best qualities are not immediately apparent... Certainly, he's no Solomon--

CATHERINE

Solomon?

SUSAN

The wise king in the Bible... who had the idea of dividing the infant disputed by two mothers in half, or in two, I can't recall the exact wording.

CATHERINE

Oh yes of course.

SUSAN

So Sir James is no Solomon -- but how many suitors of great wisdom is a young woman likely to find today?

CATHERINE

I don't know--

SUSAN

None. And I must confess that at times I wonder if such a quality is even desirable in a husband.

Catherine looks a bit surprised.

INT. CHURCHILL, DINING ROOM -- NIGHT

VERY TIGHT ON: very round, very green peas -- a knife of fine silver knocks them about a plate of fine china.

SIR JAMES (O.S.)

How jolly.

Sir James toys with them as Reginald, Catherine, Charles and Frederica watch. A pair of footmen stand against the wall.

SIR JAMES (CONT'D)

Tiny green balls...

Sir James savors a forkful.

SIR JAMES (CONT'D)

Mmm, yes, good tasting -- quite sweet. What are they called?

REGINALD

Peas.

SIR JAMES

Oh yes. I knew that. I recall now.
I must get Collins to cultivate
them at Martindale. Novelty
vegetable -- could make quite a
packet.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE GOLD ROOM -- NIGHT (FILMED)

Charles Vernon catches Catherine for a word -- Sir James can be seen circling Frederica in the Gold Room; Reginald stands by the fireplace pretending to read his Cowper volume.

CHARLES

I'm enjoying Sir James's visit. His conversation is lively, he brings a new angle to things. What do you think if I took him to see the Fredericksville farm? He's mentioned his interest in agricultural methods...

CATHERINE

Yes...

EXT. CHURCHILL, THE BEAUTIFUL TOWER - DAY

INT. CHURCHILL, STAIRWAY -- DAY

The maid brings the Vernon children, Charlotte and Frederick, down the stairs as Charlotte enjoins her little brother to be good.

LITTLE CHARLOTTE VERNON

Frederick, you must try to be good.

INT. CHURCHILL, FRONT HALL -- DAY (FILMED)

Overlapping with the children's voices, Frederica reads a volume of Cowper's poems by candlelight.

EXT. CHURCHILL, THE GARDEN -- DAY (FILMED)

Reginald - vexed - joins Lady Susan walking in the garden.

REGINALD (O.S.)

He's utterly ridiculous.

SUSAN

Certainly he's no Solomon but--

REGINALD

"Solomon?"

SUSAN

The wise king from the bible; I know he's not that. But any man, navigating the cascades of romantic courtship, and occasionally falling into those foaming waters, is not apt to appear at his best--

REGINALD

What?

Susan walks away as if vexed, then turns around:

SUSAN

A simple word, Reginald: "Comprehension." I admire your cast of mind but you might not be entirely sensible of the degree to which you intimidate others -- particularly a young man over whom you've every advantage of position, looks and character.

REGINALD

Sir James Martin is a fool because of me?

SUSAN

Yes. Around you he seems very silly.

REGINALD

He isn't silly around everyone?

SUSAN

No.

REGINALD

I believe he's given everyone the same impression.

SUSAN

They have only seen him around you.

REGINALD

But... you deny Sir James's intentions toward you?

SUSAN
Toward me?!

REGINALD
He's clearly besotted with you.

Susan laughs, as if pleased and flattered.

SUSAN
No, it's with Frederica he's smitten.

REGINALD
That's not possible.

SUSAN
He proposed to her.

REGINALD
How could such a blockhead even be allowed to court your daughter? It's incomprehensible.

SUSAN
This is the incomprehension of the rich and easeful! You can afford to take the high ground and add another layer to your pride. If you realized the full extent of ridiculous manhood a young woman without fortune must humor you would be more generous to Sir James!

EXT. HURST & WILFORD -- DAY

The hubbub of horses and attendants -- Alicia, in travelling clothes, and Lady Susan walk between them.

SUSAN
It's so good of you to steal away.

ALICIA
We can only meet through such subterfuges -- Mr. Johnson is relentless; I will not be sent back to Connecticut!

SUSAN
I don't see he'd believe that association with me would lower your reputation.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

But, a question: did Sir James mention to you any plans to come to Churchill?

ALICIA

Heavens no! What folly! How did Mr. DeCourcy react?

SUSAN

I had some gratification there: At first he observed Sir James with an attention not untinged with jealousy. But it was impossible to really torture him as I finally had to reveal that Frederica was Sir James's object. Then he was all astonishment! Left to ourselves I had no great difficulty convincing him I was justified - I can't remember the exact reasoning but it was all comfortably arranged.

ALICIA

So what's your verdict on young DeCourcy?

SUSAN

He's not stupid and has a good deal to say, but I can't help but look with a certain contempt on the fancies of a heart always doubting the reasonableness of its emotions. I vastly prefer the generous spirit of a Manwaring who, deeply convinced of one's merit, is satisfied that whatever one does is right.

ALICIA

I know that no one really deserves you but young DeCourcy might be worth having.

Susan ponders her dear friend's advice.

INT. GOLD ROOM - DAY

Sir James, seeking to charm Frederica, interrupts her reading as Charles Vernon and Reginald read nearby.

SIR JAMES

Excuse me, Frederica, when I came down this morning I couldn't help noticing that you were reading a "book." Which "book" was that?

FREDERICA

This volume of Cowper's verse.

Frederica shows the book which she had been trying to read.

SIR JAMES

Cowper, the poet? He also writes verse? Most impressive.

Reginald jumps in.

REGINALD

Yes, he's versatile that way.

SIR JAMES

So, Frederica, you read both poetry and verse? In this I believe you take after your mother, who knows all sorts of things. Just yesterday she cited to me a story from the Bible about a wise king. This reminded me of many such important accounts one learns in childhood. Perhaps most significant in forming one's principles is that of the old prophet who came down from the mountain with tablets bearing the Twelve Commandments which the Lord taught us must be obeyed without fail.

REGINALD

The Twelve Commandments?

CHARLES

(apologetically)

Excuse me, I believe there were only ten.

SIR JAMES

Oh really? Only have to obey ten? So, which two to take off then? I would say the one about the Sabbath -- I prefer to hunt.

CHARLES

Well...

SIR JAMES

After that, it gets tricky. Most of the "shalt nots" -- don't murder, don't covet thy neighbor's house, or wife --

(laughs)

-- one wouldn't think of doing anyway, as they would be wrong, whether one is allowed to take them off or not.

Sir James glances to Frederica to see if his disquisition might have impressed her.

Card: "Soon to be a relative, Sir James Martin aids a widow."

INT. CHURCHILL, DOOR TO SUSAN'S ROOMS - NIGHT

Sir James Martin speaks to Lady Susan (O.S.) outside the door to her rooms.

SIR JAMES

No, delighted... Honoured. My pleasure.

LADY SUSAN (O.S.)

Would you like me to sign a note?

SIR JAMES

No documents. No "note" necessary. All in the family...or soon to be

LADY SUSAN (O.S.)

And the carriage?

SIR JAMES

Oh, yes the carriage. Definitely. Certainly. My pleasure. Honoured.

INT. COUNTRY DANCE -- NIGHT

A glimpse or partial view of an evening dance party, either the local Assembly or a private gathering, seeing only the protagonists with a few strangers: Sir James Martin, delighted, dancing with all the ladies; Charles Vernon contentedly observing; all the others, dancing, to varying degrees uncomfortable (Reginald, Susan, Catherine) or actively distressed (Frederica) but ending on Sir James.

EXT. CHURCHILL GROUNDS AND STABLES -- DAY

Charles and Reginald, returning from an early hunt, dismount and leave their horses to grooms; Reginald heads toward the house.

INT. CHURCHILL, SALON -- DAY

Frederica, sitting with a book, listens to the sound of Reginald's approaching footsteps.

INT. CHURCHILL, GROUND FLOOR ROOMS -- DAY

Reginald approaches the salon and enters, finding Frederica with her head buried in the book.

REGINALD
Oh, hullo. Good day.

FREDERICA
Good day.

REGINALD
Would you know where I might find your mother?

FREDERICA
I believe she's gone out.

REGINALD
Gone out?

Frederica doesn't reply.

REGINALD (CONT'D)
Are you all right?

Frederica, her head plunged sharply down, first nods -- then freezes, as if about to cry.

REGINALD (CONT'D)
What is it?

Frederica can't reply.

REGINALD (CONT'D)
Tell me: what's wrong?

Frederica can't bring herself to speak.

REGINALD (CONT'D)
Please say.

FREDERICA

Sir, I...I do not know to whom I can apply.

REGINALD

What is it? Please tell me.

FREDERICA

I am sorry, I shouldn't say anything -- it's that -- you're the only one Mother might listen to.

REGINALD

Why would you say that?

FREDERICA

She pays no one such regard as she does you, except Lord Manwaring.

REGINALD

What do you mean, Manwaring?

FREDERICA

(panics)

No -- I'm sorry -- it's just that, of all people, I thought Mother would listen most to you.

REGINALD

Let me understand this: it's that you find Sir James's presence and courtship of you unwelcome?

Frederica nods.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

If his presence here disturbs you, it is to Charles or my sister to whom you should apply.

Frederica, in some torment, does not immediately reply.

FREDERICA

I - I promised Mother I would not.

REGINALD

I don't understand. Why would you promise that?

Frederica, realizing she has gone far, is flustered and panics.

FREDERICA
(in a tiny voice)
She required it.

REGINALD
What did she require?

Frederica freezes.

REGINALD (CONT'D)
What?... These silences are
vexing...

FREDERICA
Mama forbade it.

REGINALD
I don't understand.

FREDERICA
I promised not to speak to my Aunt
and Uncle on this subject.

REGINALD
For what possible reason?

FREDERICA
It's wrong of me to speak now. If
I were not at my wit's end I would
not have -- I can't marry Sir
James!

REGINALD
To what do you object?

FREDERICA
You must have noticed -- he's very
silly.

REGINALD
But besides that.

FREDERICA
Besides that?

REGINALD
Yes. I confess, the first
impression I had of him was also...
indifferent. But don't those
knowledgable of such matters
consider Sir James a good "catch,"
or "match," or whatever it is they
say?

(MORE)

REGINALD (CONT'D)

A man of cheerful temperament,
happy to devote a large income to a
wife's comfort?

FREDERICA

I'd rather work for my bread!

REGINALD

But what could you do?

FREDERICA

I could teach! I could--

REGINALD

Teach?!

FREDERICA

Yes.

REGINALD

You must have been very little in
school. Tell me: how did this
happen? Your mother is a woman of
excellent understanding, her
concern for you great -- though
wise and clear-eyed. How could she
be so mistaken if you truly despise
Sir James?

FREDERICA

I don't despise Sir James. I can
see his a kind man, with good
qualities. He is certainly
likeable, and I would be free to
truly like him if he were a cousin,
or a cousin's cousin, or a friend,
or a friend's friend, or an in-law,
or a step-something -- I just don't
want to be married to him...

Reginald stands.

REGINALD

Come. Tell me the particulars. If
they are as you say I can't for the
world imagine that your mother
would remain deaf to your wishes...

INT. CHURCHILL, BLUE ROOM -- DAY

Catherine sorts through Christmas objects when Reginald
enters, red-faced and agitated.

REGINALD
Catherine, I'd like to thank you
for this visit.

CATHERINE
You're leaving?

REGINALD
Yes, I must.

CATHERINE
Why?

REGINALD
As you've said it's important that,
at this season, one of us be with
our parents.

CATHERINE
You've just decided this now?

REGINALD
Yes. But before going I must ask
one thing: I'd be grateful if you
could see justice is done
Frederica. She's a sweet girl who
deserves a better fate.

CATHERINE
I'm glad you now see her worth.

REGINALD
Yes, my eyes have opened to many
things....

INT. CHURCHILL, UPSTAIRS CORRIDOR - DAY

Frederica walks toward the stairs.

INT. CHURCHILL, PARLOR - DAY

Frederica enters and sits near Catherine.

FREDERICA
Aunt, I did something very wrong--

CATHERINE
I'm sure not--

Catherine goes to her.

FREDERICA

No, I did. And now he and my mother
have quarrelled: he's to leave and
it's my fault! Mama will never
forgive me--

CATHERINE

Don't worry. If any of what you
fear comes to pass, I'll happily
intercede...

INT. CHURCHILL, UPSTAIRS CORRIDOR -- DAY

Frederica returning to her room.

INSERT: A hand grabs a packet of "Dr. Preston's Lozenges"

INT. CHURCHILL, GOLD ROOM -- DAY

Lady Susan enters, in a seemingly placid mood.

SUSAN

Good afternoon, Catherine. That
cough of young Frederick's worries
me -- I have from London some of
Dr. Preston's excellent lozenges.
Could you use some for the dear
boy?

She hands Catherine the package.

CATHERINE

Yes, thank you.

SUSAN

I've also a request: Could you tell
me if it's true that we will be
losing Mr. DeCourcy today?

CATHERINE

Yes, it seems that we will.

SUSAN

How remarkable. When he and I
spoke, barely an hour ago, he
mentioned nothing of it.

Susan looks into Catherine's face to divine an answer.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Perhaps he did not then know himself.

(a laugh)

Young men are so impetuous in their resolutions--

CATHERINE

I wouldn't say Reginald is impetuous--

SUSAN

Oh yes, he is -- he's like other young men that way: Hasty in making resolutions, but just as quick to unmake them! I'd be very surprised if he were not to change his mind and stay.

CATHERINE

He seemed quite decided.

SUSAN

(smiles)

We'll see...

(leaving)

Some strangeness also seems to be affecting Frederica -- I believe the girl's actually fallen in love, with your brother the object!

INT. CHURCHILL, CORRIDOR -- DAY

Wilson knocks at a door; Reginald, jacketless, opens it.

WILSON

Sir, Lady Susan asks if she might have a word with you She asked if you would be so kind as to visit her in her dressing room.

INT. CHURCHILL STAIRWAY -- DAY

Reginald, dressed, ascends the stairs, a determined expression on his face. He knocks on the door.

SUSAN (O.S.)

Come in.

INT. LADY SUSAN'S ROOMS, CHURCHILL -- DAY

Reginald enters -- half sheepish, half self-righteous. For a long moment Susan says nothing.

SUSAN

I beg your pardon for the liberty of calling you here, Sir, but I've just learned of your intention to leave today. Is that true?

REGINALD

Yes, it is.

SUSAN

I entreat you not, on my account, to shorten your visit by even an hour.

REGINALD

Well--

SUSAN

I am perfectly aware that after what has passed between us it would ill-suit either of us to remain in the same house: It's I who should go.

REGINALD

No. Why?

Lady Susan raises her hand.

SUSAN

My visit has already been inconvenient for your family; for me to stay risks dividing a clan affectionately attached to one another. Where I go is of little consequence whereas your presence is important to all.

INT. CHURCHILL, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY -- DAY

A somber Reginald leaves Lady Susan's rooms.

SUSAN (O.S.)

It's terrifying how close I came to destruction...

INT. EDWARD ST. HOUSE -- DAY

Susan has just arrived; Alicia Johnson meets her in the hall.

SUSAN

It all started with Frederica, in the grip of a madness of some kind, entreating Reginald to intercede on her behalf -- as if I were some unkind mother not wanting the best for my child.

They pass from the hall into the salon.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Next Reginald appears at my rooms with an expression of the utmost solemnity to inform me of the impropriety of allowing Sir James Martin to court Frederica! I tried to joke him out of it but he refused to be.

ALICIA

Heavens, is he really so pompous--

SUSAN

The pomposity I assume; it's his disloyalty which outraged me! If he held me in true regard he would not believe such insinuations in my disfavour! A worthy lover should assume one has unanswerable motives for all one does!

ALICIA

Certainly--

Susan pauses, continuing in a softer register.

SUSAN

Scarcely an hour had gone by when I learned Reginald was leaving Churchill: Something had to be done; condescension was necessary though I abhor it. I sent for Reginald; when he appeared he seemed astonished at the summons, and looked as if half-wishing, half-fearing, to be softened by what I might say-- The outcome justifies some portion of vanity, my dear, for it was no less favorable than immediate.

ALICIA

You brilliant creature.

SUSAN

So now I have many tasks: I must punish Frederica for her application to Reginald, punish him for receiving it so favorably, and make myself serious amends for the humiliations I've been obliged to undergo.

ALICIA

Manwaring's in town.

SUSAN

Manwaring! How is he, the divine man?

ALICIA

Absolutely miserable about you and jealous of DeCourcy -- to such a degree I can't answer for his not committing some great imprudence such as following you to Churchill--

SUSAN

Heavens!

ALICIA

I think I persuaded him from it. If you do follow my advice and marry DeCourcy, it will be indispensable for you to get Manwaring out of the way. Only you have the influence to send him home.

SUSAN

(thoughtful)

And by remaining in Town I'll be able to reward a long penance at Churchill with a little welcome dissipation.

A footman enters.

FOOTMAN

Madam, Lord Manwaring has arrived and begs to be admitted.

Alicia and Susan exchange a look; Susan nods.

ALICIA
Please ask him to wait.

Susan checks her perfection in a mirror, as the servant leaves.

EXT. CHURCHILL, FORLORN PATH -- DAY

The sky dark and threatening Frederica, bundled against the cold, walks a forlorn path, the estate church visible or not before her.

INT. CHURCHILL CHAPEL -- DAY

Frederica sits in a side pew by a stained glass window, head bent in meditation or prayer.

CURATE (O.S.)
Miss Vernon? It's so good to see
you here!

The affable young CURATE stands before her.

CURATE (CONT'D)
Might I help you?

FREDERICA
Yes... A friend was asking how, in
accord with Christian teaching, the
Fourth Commandment should be
honored...

CURATE
The Fourth Commandment? Yes --
"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep
it holy."

FREDERICA
No, I meant the Commandment, "Honor
thy Father and Mother..."

CURATE
Oh, the Fifth Commandment -- my
favorite! It's the Church of Rome
that has it as the Fourth-- yes,
the Fifth Commandment:

(MORE)

CURATE (CONT'D)

"Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." Beautiful, profound -- I believe one should apply this sentiment of Gratitude and Loyalty to every aspect of our lives. We are not born into a savage wilderness but in a beautiful mansion of the Lord that the Lord and those who have gone before us have constructed. We must avoid neglecting this mansion but rather glorify and preserve it -- as we should all of the Lord's Creation. The superb Baumgarten has outlined this aesthetic trinity as "Beauty," "Truth," and "Good." "Truth" is the perfect perceived by reason; "Beauty," by the senses; and the "Good" by moral will.

Frederica looks greatly inspired by the Curate's words.

EXT. CHURCHILL, FORLORN PATH -- DAY

Frederica, returning to Churchill, encounters Reginald returned from a ride. He looks surprised.

REGINALD

From where do you come?

FREDERICA

Church.

REGINALD

Why were you in church?

FREDERICA

Well... it is our religion.

REGINALD

Yes, but this time of day -- neither morning prayer nor vespers?

Frederica, dodging an explanation.

FREDERICA

The sky had clouded over -- I was sure there would be a downpour.

REGINALD

There was...

Reginald shakes some water from his clothes. Frederica now sees that he's soaking wet, water dripping from his clothes.

FREDERICA

Oh you are quite drenched! You must get into some dry clothes!

She moves forward protectively, her hands touching him and then withdraws them embarrassedly as if having touched a hot surface.

FREDERICA (CONT'D)

Oh excuse me!

INT. MAIN HALL, PARKLANDS -- NIGHT

Lady DeCourcy greets Catherine still in her travelling cloak.

LADY DECOURCY

Dearest, welcome!

CATHERINE

Oh, mother!

Embracing her and almost crying.

LADY DECOURCY

What joy your letter gave us!

CATHERINE

I wrote too hastily--

LADY DECOURCY

What?

CATHERINE

I couldn't imagine that every expectation I had would be dashed so quickly.

LADY DECOURCY

You frighten me.

CATHERINE

Poor girl -- her one chance to break free... Who knows what punishment her mother will now impose.

LADY DECOURCY

But Reginald can't be blind to such a lovely girl.

CATHERINE

He's become blind: Reginald is more
securely Lady Susan's than ever.

LADY DECOURCY

Please don't tell your father - I
worry for his constitution.

Sir Reginald appears from the hallway:

SIR REGINALD

Tell me what?

EXT. EDWARD ST. HOUSE -- DAY

Susan's carriage arrives at Edward Street and she steps out.
Alicia intercepts her from the front door.

ALICIA

Susan! Stop!

Alicia runs down the stairs.

ALICIA (CONT'D)

Dreadful news - Mr. Johnson's been
cured!

SUSAN

How is that possible?

ALICIA

No sooner had he heard you were in
London than he had a cure.

SUSAN

Then could you do me the greatest
favor? Could you go to Seymour
Street and receive Reginald there.
I dare not risk his and Manwaring's
meeting -- keep him with you all
evening if you can. Make up
anything...

EXT. UPPER SEYMOUR STREET -- DAY

Reginald arrives in a carriage and steps out, dodging a hole
in the pavement where workmen replace cobblestones. He
approaches the stairs to Lady Susan's building.

INT. UPPER SEYMOUR STREET, SALON -- DAY

Reginald and Susan enter together.

SUSAN

I'm sorry I wasn't here to greet you but didn't I provide a charming substitute?

Reginald remains silent - evidently pouting.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

It's strange: You remain silent but Mrs. Johnson couldn't stop singing your praises.

REGINALD

Excuse me?

SUSAN

I fear Alicia has rather fallen in love with you - it's given me quite a scare.

REGINALD

You're joking.

SUSAN

But you did like her?

REGINALD

Of course--

SUSAN

I so admire Alicia: she has none of the uncouthness one expects from Americans but all of the candor. Her husband, Mr. Johnson, is older and rather disagreeable but a word of complaint never drops from Alicia's lips. Exemplary. Only by one's friends can one truly be known; that Alicia is mine will, I hope, help you think better of me.

REGINALD

I already thought well of you.

Susan thinks.

SUSAN

You were not "plagued by doubt?"

REGINALD

Some things disconcerted me: That
you were not here, that--

SUSAN

Please, Reginald, don't be severe --
I can't support reproaches...

REGINALD

But--

SUSAN

No, I entreat you, I can't support
them. My absence was to arrange a
matter so that we could be
together. I'm forbidden to say
more; please don't reproach me.

REGINALD

Have you considered what I asked?

SUSAN

I have and I believe our affairs
require a delicacy and caution
which, in our candid enthusiasm, we
have perhaps insufficiently heeded--

REGINALD

What do you mean?

SUSAN

I fear our feelings have hurried us
to a degree which ill accords with
the views of the world.

REGINALD

I'm sure, in time--

SUSAN

Perhaps, with time, but given the
poignancy of our feelings--

REGINALD

You no longer wish to marry?

SUSAN

No, no, no. All I'm saying - or
hesitantly suggesting - is that we
postpone an open understanding
until the opinion of the world is
more in accord with our own
inclinations.

REGINALD
When might that be?

Susan considers the question.

SUSAN
I would say we should let the
opinions of our friends be our
guide.

REGINALD
That could mean never!

SUSAN
No, no. Perhaps... months. I confess
that such delay is against all my
inclinations--

REGINALD
Then let's--

SUSAN
No, I can't be responsible for
dividing your family.

REGINALD
I thought we'd decided.

SUSAN
I know such delays seem
insupportable, especially when we
are both in London. With
separations, only those that are
also geographical can reasonably be
tolerated.

REGINALD
What?

SUSAN
I'm sorry, Reginald: staying in
London would be the death of our
reputations. We must not meet. And
not to meet, we must not be near.
Cruel as this may seem, the
necessity of it will be evident to
you.

REGINALD
Where will you go?

SUSAN

Of course it's necessary that I remain in London -- there are arrangements I must make for us to be together. But on the contrary I know your family craves your company -- especially that elderly gentleman to whom you owe so much. I'd hate to be the cause of an *éloignement* between you and your father, who - forgive me - might not have long left.

REGINALD

There's no reason for worry that I know of -- Father's rather in his prime.

SUSAN

Oh thank Heavens! So he's not in decline?

REGINALD

He has the usual aches and pains but is overall, I believe, in good health. In any case he'd not want any concern on that account - which he'd consider so much rubbish.

SUSAN

Ah, mortality! Our mortality and that of others -- but most particularly our own -- is the hardest and most implacable hand life deals us. I long to meet the dear gentleman. Of course it's natural that he would want to ignore or minimize the cold, sad end that awaits us.

REGINALD

Not at all. Father's a Christian, for whom the prospect of the end is neither sad nor cold.

SUSAN

Ah, yes! Well thank Heaven for our religion -- so important in this life, and most especially in the next.

Reginald paces the room.

REGINALD
 Must we really wait? I entreat you
 to reconsider.

INT. EDWARD ST. HOUSE -- DAY

A servant opens the door to Lady Manwaring, crying and
 "fretted thinner and uglier than ever," accompanied by two
 servants including OWEN.

ALICIA
 Lady Manwaring!

LADY MANWARING
 (in tears)
 Excuse me... I'm in... such a state, I
 don't know what to say... Is Mr.
 Johnson at home?
 (close to sobbing)
 I must speak with my guardian.

ALICIA
 Yes, yes, of course. You poor dear!
 I'll let him know you're here.

Alicia leads her into the salon and puts her head into the
 library.

ALICIA (CONT'D)
 Lucy Manwaring is here to see you.

LADY MANWARING
 (howling)
 Mr. Johnson!

Lady Manwaring lunges into the library and disappears within.

ALICIA
 Yes, please go in.

LADY MANWARING (O.S.)
 You must help! You must help me!
 Manwaring's left!

Alicia closes the door but leans close to hear.

MR. JOHNSON (O.S. OR PARTIAL)
 Dear Lucy, please, calm yourself.
 Here, take a seat.

LADY MANWARING (O.S.)
 He's gone -- with no intention of
 returning!

MR. JOHNSON (O.S.)
 What exactly's happened... Please
 tell me everything, as best you
 can.

A footman enters the salon to announce a visitor.

JOHNSON FOOTMAN
 Madam, Mr. DeCourcy.

Reginald enters.

REGINALD
 Oh, good day.

ALICIA
 Mr. DeCourcy!

She is taken aback but approaches him.

ALICIA (CONT'D)
 What a surprise to see you! So kind
 of you to call.

REGINALD
 I must thank you for last evening -
 for setting matters right. Lady
 Susan has explained everything.
 I'm ashamed to have spoken as I did
 -- it was foolish of me--

ALICIA
 No, no not at all -- most
 sympathetic...

Alicia maneuvers to keep Reginald away from the library, from
 which voices can still be heard.

ALICIA (CONT'D)
 But you didn't have to come to
 thank me -- courtesy did not
 dictate it...

REGINALD
 In fact it's not my sole motive --
 Lady Susan has entrusted me with a
 letter for you.

Reginald hands her the letter.

ALICIA
 (reading)
 "Strictly private" - how
 intriguing.

Lady Manwaring's scarcely human high-pitched plaint is too audible to ignore.

REGINALD

Has an animal been injured?!

ALICIA

Amateur theatricals... "Medea" --
They perform next week but prefer
not to be watched rehearsing.

Alicia hurries Reginald toward the door.

ALICIA (CONT'D)

Thank you again for the charming
evening.

Lady Manwaring bursts out of the library followed by Mr. Johnson -- Reginald, too close to the door to see them unobstructed, catches only glimpses of the drama.

LADY MANWARING

She's with him now! This can't
continue! It mustn't--

MR. JOHNSON

Lucy, please don't! Stay here,
rest, recover your equanimity--

LADY MANWARING

Equanimity!? They're together now!
(to Mr. Johnson)
I implore you -- come with me,
talk with Manwaring, reason with
him. As my Guardian, won't you
help?--

MR. JOHNSON

Even if I found them, what good
could be done?

Alicia has returned partway to the room.

ALICIA

Yes, heed Mr. Johnson, in such
matters his counsel is excellent--

LADY MANWARING

What have you? A letter in her
hand!

Lady Manwaring snatches the envelope from Alicia.

ALICIA

Return that letter, Madam. It is not for you.

Lady Manwaring tears it open.

MR. JOHNSON

Lucy, no!

Reginald snatches the letter, holding it away from her.

REGINALD

Excuse me, Madam, I believe you were on the verge of making a grave error. You are Lady Manwaring? Lady Manwaring of Langford? You've recognized your friend Lady Susan Vernon's hand and assume the letter's for you--

LADY MANWARING

You think that Lady is my friend? She's with my husband now; as we speak, he visits her!

REGINALD

That's impossible, Madam. I've just left her; she's entirely alone, even her servant sent off.

LADY MANWARING

Owen!

The Johnson footman leads Lord Manwaring's servant, OWEN, into the salon.

LADY MANWARING (CONT'D)

Owen -- come here, stand here. Tell this gentleman what you've seen.

OWEN

Your ladyship..

LADY MANWARING

Repeat to him what you told me.

Owen turns to Reginald.

OWEN

Well, Sir, Lady Susan sent her servant away, then you left.

(MORE)

OWEN (CONT'D)

A few minutes later Lord Manwaring arrived and was received by her ladyship.

REGINALD

Alone?

OWEN

Yes, sir, I believe so. No one else came or went.

Lady Manwaring snatches the letter and starts devouring it.

REGINALD

No - stop! The letter's for Mrs. Johnson only!

LADY MANWARING

Here:

(reading)

"I send Reginald with this letter -- keep him there all evening if you can; Manwaring comes this very hour."

REGINALD

That's not possible.

LADY MANWARING

I must stop this!

(to Mr. Johnson)

Please, Sir, come with me.

MR. JOHNSON

What could possibly be gained? It could even be dangerous; this is a matter for your solicitors.

(turning to Alicia)

Mrs. Johnson, this goes beyond what I could imagine -- you promised to give up all contact with this woman.

ALICIA

I've no idea what she writes! She's gone mad!

MR. JOHNSON

I'm sorry to say, my dear, that I hear the Atlantic passage is very cold this time of year.

Alicia is stunned, Lucy Manwaring in hysterics.

EXT/INT. CARRIAGE, LONDON STREETS -- DAY

Tight on Alicia's pensive face as she rides in a carriage.

INT. UPPER SEYMOUR STREET -- DAY

Alicia Johnson arrives, taking off her cloak.

ALICIA
Agonies, my dear!

SUSAN
What happened?

ALICIA
The worst. Disaster--

SUSAN
Disaster?

ALICIA
Mr. DeCourcy arrived just when he should not have -- Lucy Manwaring had just forced herself into Mr. Johnson's study to sob her woes.

SUSAN
Has she no pride, no self-respect?

ALICIA
What an impression she makes -- bursting from Mr. Johnson's library wailing like a struck child. Seeing the letter in your handwriting, she tore it from Reginald to read aloud--

SUSAN
No!

ALICIA
Yes. "Manwaring comes this very hour!"

SUSAN
And Reginald heard that?

ALICIA
He read it himself.

SUSAN
How ungentlemanly! Shocking! I can't believe it.

ALICIA

Yes, very shocking.

SUSAN

A gentleman, entrusted with correspondence marked "private," reads it regardless -- and then, because of some confidential remarks, the obloquy is mine! But who has acted badly in this affair? Only you and I stand innocent of reading other people's correspondence!

ALICIA

Unluckily Lady Manwaring also wormed out of her husband's servant that Manwaring visited you in private.

SUSAN

Oh.

(she contemplates this)

Facts are horrid things!

Susan paces the room, then recovers.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Don't worry : I'll make my story good with Reginald. He'll be a little enraged at first but I vow that, by dinner tomorrow, all will be well.

Alicia looks more doubtful.

ALICIA

I'm not sure... He was with Mr. Johnson when I left. Forgive me for saying it but... I dread to imagine what's being said in your disfavour...

Susan stops pacing and regards Alicia with compassion:

SUSAN

What a mistake you made marrying Mr. Johnson: Too old to be governable, too young to die!

EXT. MONTAGE: LONDON IMAGES SUGGESTING A DAY'S PASSING -
DAY/NIGHT

St. Paul's on the horizon at sunset or dawn, perhaps period
London stock shots, to be researched.

EXT. UPPER SEYMOUR STREET -- DAY

Reginald climbs the steps and knocks on the door.

INT. UPPER SEYMOUR STREET -- DAY

The maid shows Reginald up the stairs -- he is very somber.
He enters the salon and addresses Lady Susan.

REGINALD
Good afternoon, Madam.

INT. UPPER SEYMOUR STREET, OUTSIDE SALON -- DAY

The maid has her ear to the door eavesdropping on the
conversation within. We hear through the door:

SUSAN
Of course it might seem outlandish
or shocking to others--

INT. UPPER SEYMOUR STREET, SALON -- DAY

Lady Susan, in a dressing gown, sits as Reginald stands.

SUSAN
-- but we are not expecting others
to read our correspondence and
don't put things for their benefit.
Manwaring only visited me as his
wife's friend--

REGINALD
"Friend?" She herself denies this.

SUSAN
Of course -- I was her friend when
she was sane, her great enemy
since. Manwaring left Langford to
escape her deranged suspicions. In
granting him an interview my sole
motive was to persuade him to
return to her and see what might be
done to ease the poor woman's mind--

REGINALD

But why "alone?" Why did you arrange to see him alone?

SUSAN

You cannot divine the motive there? Servants have ears, with the unfortunate tendency to repeat whatever they imagine they have hear. I dreaded injuring the poor lady's reputation still further.

REGINALD

You imagine I could accept such an explanation?

SUSAN

I can only tell you what I know to be true.

REGINALD

Did you succeed?

SUSAN

What?

REGINALD

Did you convince Manwaring to return to his wife?

SUSAN

Yes. I did. But it seems that her judgment is too deteriorated to allow it. Her suspicious and jealous condition is not one that will accept reassurance.

REGINALD

You forget, I saw the letter with my own eyes--

SUSAN

No, I do not forget. I greatly resent it -- a fault you compounded by misinterpreting what you should never have seen. Do you think I would have confided a letter to a third party if I thought its contents in any way dangerous? Haven't I already explained everything which the ill-nature of the world might interpret to my discredit? What could so stagger your esteem for me now?

(MORE)

SUSAN (CONT'D)

After all we've discussed and meant to one another, that you could doubt my intentions, my actions, my word..

Reginald is silent.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Reginald. I've reflected upon this deeply: I cannot marry a man with an untrusting disposition. I cannot have it.

REGINALD

(softly, stunned)

What?

SUSAN

We cannot marry. Whatever commitment there was between us is severed; any connection impossible.

REGINALD

What are you saying?

SUSAN

Mistrust does not bode well for any union. I have a great regard for you - yes, a passionate one. But I must master it.

Distraught, Reginald bows and leaves.

INT. PARKLANDS, GARDEN PARLOR -- DAY

Lady DeCourcy looks out for her daughter in a happy mood.

LADY DECOURCY

Catherine! Catherine!

Catherine Vernon enters from the garden.

CATHERINE

What is it, Mother?

LADY DECOURCY

Reginald's returned.

CATHERINE

He's here?

LADY DECOURCY

He's just gone to find your father.

CATHERINE

It's not--

LADY DECOURCY

No, the most happy news - our fears were in vain.

CATHERINE

What?

LADY DECOURCY

The engagement's off!

CATHERINE

How?

LADY DECOURCY

Lady Susan broke it off herself.

CATHERINE

She did?

Catherine looks apprehensive.

LADY DECOURCY

Reginald's most cast down. But I'm sure he'll soon recover and -- dare we hope -- cast his look elsewhere?

Catherine thinks further.

CATHERINE

That woman's a fiend!

LADY DECOURCY

What do you mean?

CATHERINE

Lady Susan. She has an uncanny understanding of men's natures.

A look of worry and confusion crosses Lady DeCourcy's face.

LADY DECOURCY

Uncanny?

CATHERINE

Reginald will start again to doubt everything he's heard to her detriment; a guilty regret will overwhelm him. Slowly, surely he'll convince himself he's wronged her.

LADY DECOURCY

You frighten me!

CATHERINE

Yes, if Frederick Vernon, renowned for good sense, let Lady Susan ruin him -- what chance has Reginald?

LADY DECOURCY

You speak as if your brother were not wise; everyone comments on his lively intelligence.

CATHERINE

You're the best of mothers but Reginald has just the sort of sincere nature most vulnerable to a woman of her genius--

LADY DECOURCY

You think she's a genius?

CATHERINE

Diabolically so, like the serpent in Eden's Garden.

LADY DECOURCY

Does this woman always get her way?

CATHERINE

From what I understand only clever tradesmen are astute enough to see through her stratagems; several banded together to send their agents to intercept her on Seymour Street, obliging her to pawn the last of her jewels.

Paces can be heard down the hall: Reginald and his father enter, Reginald cast down while the old man seems in high spirits.

SIR REGINALD

Slay the fatted calf, my dear -- the prodigal's returned!

He looks to Reginald, a wet blanket.

SIR REGINALD (CONT'D)

What's wrong, my boy? The joy of seeing your aged parents eludes you?

Lady DeCourcy steps off screen.

CATHERINE
Don't tease him, Father.

SIR REGINALD
It's a father's right.

CATHERINE
You'll have him fleeing back to
London.

REGINALD
No risk of that I assure you.
London holds no charm for me.

SIR REGINALD
Oh you've realized that: Good.
Never appealed to me at all.
Dirty, noisy -- noxious gases,
soot... I don't see the point of
towns. Far better to live on one's
own land. Everyone should.

CATHERINE
I'm afraid this relates to my
sister-in-law.

REGINALD
Yes, sister -- congratulations on
your entire vindication.

CATHERINE
On the contrary, I don't see you
out of danger at all.

REGINALD
I assuredly am.

SIR REGINALD
What's all this about? What's
happened? I don't understand.

Lady DeCourcy re-enters with a sheaf of music and blushing
Frederica.

LADY DECOURCY
Reginald dear, Frederica's prepared
a charming piece -- help me
persuade her to sing it for us.

FREDERICA
Oh, no -- you're too kind, Lady
DeCourcy. I'm not ready--

REGINALD

Excuse me, Miss Vernon, Mother: As much as I'd like to, I'm afraid I'm too tired to be a suitable audience-

Outside, the sound of a carriage approaching.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

So, if you'll excuse me--

SIR REGINALD

No, you must stay. Frederica's a songbird -- never heard anything like it.

(to Frederica)

Don't deny us this pleasure, my dear. Reginald, we need you to insist.

REGINALD

Well, as I said, I--

FREDERICA

No, I'm sorry. Excuse me.

LADY DECOURCY

You must play it, my dear. Please--

SIR REGINALD

"The Kentish Nightingale," I call her. Voice's remarkable - even to my hearing.

REGINALD

She must have it from her mother's side: Lady Susan's voice is a clear, natural soprano. Lovely, beautiful...

Catherine looks out the window.

SIR REGINALD

Oh, it is, is it?

CATHERINE

Do you expect visitors, Mother?

LADY DECOURCY

No... Who would visit us?

Charles Vernon enters, smiling.

CHARLES

Look who's come from London --
what an agreeable surprise!

Lady Susan enters.

SUSAN

Excuse me for arriving this way--

Except for Charles the others remain absolutely still.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

What a delightful family pose!

CHARLES

Yes, it is the season for families
to unite -- so especially welcome
to have you here.

SUSAN

Thank you, Charles!

(to Sir & Lady DeC)

I do hope that, recognizing a
mother's anxiety to see her child,
you might excuse my abruptness.

CHARLES

Nothing to excuse. Sir Reginald,
Lady DeCourcy -- might I introduce
my sister-in-law, Lady Susan
Vernon.

SUSAN

Enchanté. Please forgive this
intrusion but now that I'm fixed in
town I can't rest with Frederica
away.

CATHERINE

Isn't such anxiety new?

SUSAN

(ever cheerful)

Yes, it is -- I entirely agree. But
now I'm in London where the
instruction Frederica needs can so
readily be found. Her voice has
some promise--

SIR REGINALD

"Some?" She's a veritable songbird -
- "The Kentish Nightingale," I call
her.

SUSAN

Do you? Is this really Kent?

She takes a glance in the direction of the window and the moonlit night.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

How delightful. (Flashes a smile.)
You are right, Sir -- Frederica has
the native talent a bird might. But
those few notes can get repetitive.

FREDERICA

But, Mama, couldn't I stay?

SUSAN

(repeats)

"But, Mama, couldn't I stay?"
Charming.

(to Catherine)

Thank you, dear sister, for making
Frederica feel so welcome and at
home

(to Lady DeCourcy)

wherever she goes.

(to Frederica)

I've secured you a lesson with
Signore Veltroni. Where the Grand
Affair of Education is concerned,
there's no excuse for half-
measures!

(to Sir Reginald, loudly)

Isn't it key to cultivate her
voice, Sir? A "nightingale," didn't
you say?

Sir Reginald is a little loud always.

SIR REGINALD

Yes, that's right. The "Kentish
Nightingale" I call her.

SUSAN

A delightful appellation and
perhaps, with a teacher such as
Signore Veltroni, it could even
become true. Frederica, have you
your things?

LADY DECOURCY.

Leave for London now? We'd so
looked forward to having Frederica
with us.

SUSAN

How remarkable: Only a few weeks ago it was hard to find anywhere for Frederica, now the World fights for her company! Astonishing.

CATHERINE

Astonishing that she was neglected then, or is fought over now?

SUSAN

An excellent observation, dear sister -- but I will stop now, because I know my daughter hates to be praised.

(to Reginald)

How are you, Sir? I hope well.

(to Frederica)

We should go.

FREDERICA

Excuse me, Mama, I must collect my things.

SUSAN

Yes, you must -- we can't buy a new wardrobe for each displacement.

Frederica and Susan leave.

LADY DECOURCY

The poor girl - did you see her face?

CATHERINE

I must talk to her and remind her that she'll always have a home with us.

LADY DECOURCY

(Looking to Sir Reginald)

Or us.

CHARLES

If you are referring to the past I doubt her mother will again risk misinterpretation. Henceforth we can rest assured that Lady Susan will make clear to Frederica the consideration and affection which guide her actions.

EXT. LONDON PERSPECTIVE - DAY

Lady Susan's carriage approaches.

EXT. GARDEN, EDWARD STREET -- DAY

Alicia and Lady Susan walking along the sculpted paths of the Johnsons' garden.

SUSAN

I've not gone to the trouble of retrieving Frederica from Parklands to again be thwarted! Maria Manwaring may sob, Frederica whimper, and the Vernons storm - but Sir James will be Frederica's husband before the winter's out!

ALICIA

You brilliant creature!

SUSAN

Thank you, my dear. I'm done submitting my will to the caprices of others; of resigning my own judgment in deference to those to whom I owe no duty and feel little respect. Too easily have I let my resolve weaken: Frederica shall know the difference!

ALICIA

You're too indulgent with the girl -
- why let Frederica have him, when you could grab him yourself?

SUSAN

Sir James?

ALICIA

Yes. I know your unselfish nature -- but can you afford to bestow Sir James on Frederica while having no Sir James of your own?

A look of disagreeable surprise crosses Susan's face. Meanwhile a footman approaches.

JOHNSON FOOTMAN

(addressing Alicia)

Madam, Mr. Johnson sends word he returns to dine.

ALICIA

Thank you.

SUSAN

(whispers)

Are you insulting me?

ALICIA

Just the opposite: I don't doubt your ability to get DeCourcy whenever you want him, but is he really worth having? Isn't his father just the sort of enraging old man who will live forever? How would you survive? On the allowance that Frederica, as Lady Martin, might grant you? As guests at Churchill? I'd rather be married to my own husband than dependent on

INT. PARKLANDS -- DAY

Catherine folds a letter she has just finished reading to Lady DeCourcy; the season has changed.

CATHERINE

...We must protect her -- not just for her own but for her dear, late father's.

LADY DECOURCY

But what can we do?

CATHERINE

We must find the argument that will persuade her mother it's in her own interest, which is of course her only guide. That will mean going to London; fortunately Charles must have some business or other there to justify such a trip.

LADY DECOURCY

What a marvellous husband you have; Charles seems to live to oblige.

CATHERINE

It's true, I've been lucky -- Charles always seems to have some pretext or other for doing just what's wanted.

Charles arrives from down the hall.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
Dearest, I believe you have
pressing business in London.

CHARLES
Oh, um, yes.

INT/EXT -- UPPER SEYMOUR STREET, LONDON -- DAY

Lady Susan leads Charles and Catherine Vernon up the top of
the stairs toward the salon.

SUSAN
(calling up the stairs)
Frederica!
(to the Vernons)
You're so kind to visit: Frederica
will be delighted. How are the
children -- especially my dear
Frederick?

CATHERINE
Very well, thank you--

SUSAN
(calling up the stairs)
Frederica, come see who's here!
(to the Vernons)
I can't express my gratitude for
the hospitality you've extended us.

CHARLES
Not at all -- our great pleasure.

Frederica comes down the stairs, again in her former fearful
mode.

CATHERINE
Hello, Frederica.

CHARLES
Good afternoon, my dear. I hope you
are well.

FREDERICA
Thank you -- it's so good to see
you.

SUSAN
Frederica, why don't you go
upstairs and play a piece?
(MORE)

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Select something charming to show
your aunt and uncle what you've
studied.

FREDERICA

With pleasure.

Frederica leaves.

SUSAN

(to Charles)

Do mind your head.

He ducks going through the door.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

You'll see the strides she's been
making - Frederica plays all the
new music: Haydn, Himmel,
Bernardini...Cherubini.

They all sit.

CHARLES

So you're happy with the progress
she's making?

SUSAN

(a thoughtful pause, quite
long)

Yes... Only in a city such as
London, I believe, could she have
had such instruction.

Charles turns to Catherine.

CHARLES

Well, if Frederica is making such
good progress in London -- that
complicates matters...

SUSAN

What complication would that be?

CHARLES

We'd hoped Frederica might return
to Churchill

CATHERINE

She's greatly missed, by the little
ones especially--

SUSAN

What a moving sentiment of cousinly regard. My concern, my obligation, is to see the defects in Frederica's education repaired.

CHARLES

Could we invite one of her teachers to Churchill to continue her lessons there?

SUSAN

What a kind thought. But these are London's most sought-after masters; no invitation to a country retreat, even such a delightful one as Churchill, is likely to be in their power to accept.

CHARLES

Perhaps a private tutor then--

SUSAN

Might I confess something? Frederica and I have become such great friends it would be hard for me to part with her. You might have noticed that, for a time, there was a strange tension between us. That has now happily disappeared -- you can imagine how pleased I am.

Catherine seems to sag.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Excuse me, are you quite well?

CATHERINE

Sorry -- we'd so set our hearts on Frederica's return.

SUSAN

I understand completely. She's become an agreeable companion -- even her tendency to extreme quiet I've grown to find rather soothing.
(a brief glance off)
But there is one factor that concern me: does she look quite well?

CHARLES

Oh yes.

SUSAN

That was your impression? London's vaporous air is not, I worry, quite healthy for her. Does she not seem pale?

CATHERINE

She does. The London air, these smoky gases, cannot be salutary for her. Fresh, country air is what the young require.

SUSAN

Yes, how curious they are.

For a moment an awkward silence descends, broken by Charles:

CHARLES

Does not the town's dank air favor the spread of influenza?

SUSAN

The influenza? In London?

CHARLES

Several cases have been reported -- it, after all, is the season for it.

SUSAN

Of all the disorders in the world, the risk of an influenza contagion is what I most dread for Frederica's constitution.

CATHERINE

Shouldn't we consider then removing her from this danger?

SUSAN

What you say gives me pause... But it'd be such a hardship to lose my daughter's companionship just as I've come to rely on it -- and of course her studies...

EXT. UPPER SEYMOUR STREET -- DAY

From her house Susan climbs into Mrs. Johnson's carriage, her spirit exultant.

SUSAN

Congratulate me, my dear --
Frederica's aunt and uncle have
taken her back to Churchill.

ALICIA

I thought you'd grown to enjoy
Frederica's company so.

SUSAN

Comparatively. A bit. But I'm not
so self-indulgent as to want to
wallow in the companionship of a
child.

The carriage approaches the park.

ALICIA

Alas, I fear this is our last
meeting, at least while Mr. Johnson
is in life. His business at
Hartford has become extensive. If I
continue to see you he vows to
settle in Con-nect-i-cut forever.

SUSAN

(shocked)
You could be scalped!!

SUSAN (CONT'D)

(moved, voice tremulous)
I always suspected that the great
word "Respectable" would one day
divide us. Your husband I abhor but
we must yield to necessity. Our
affection cannot be impaired by it
and, in happier times, when your
situation is as independent as
mine, we will unite again -- for
this I shall impatiently wait.

She gives Alicia's hands a last squeeze.

ALICIA

I also.

SUSAN

May Mr. Johnson's next gouty attack
end more favorably!

The carriage pulls to a stop near the palatial archway.
Susan steps down from it and looks through the archway to
where handsome, romantic Manwaring waits.

EXT. CHURCHILL - DAY

A month or more later, the season milder. A long view of two figures walking and talking animatedly in the garden -- Frederica and Reginald.

INT. CHURCHILL, MAIN HALL - DAY

A footman hands Charles Vernon correspondence which he looks through -- one letter attracts his particular attention. Catherine joins him.

CHARLES

Do you know where Frederica is?
Lady Susan's written her.

INT. CHURCHILL, GOLD ROOM -- DAY

Catherine looks for Frederica, just returned from her walk.

CATHERINE

Frederica.... Frederica!

FREDERICA

Coming!

CATHERINE

Frederica -- a letter from your
mother!

Frederica arrives in walking clothes - followed by Reginald.

FREDERICA

Thank you, Aunt Catherine. What
does she say?

CATHERINE

She's written to you herself.

Frederica takes the closed envelope and opens it. Charles joins them.

FREDERICA

My mother and Sir James Martin have
wed!

REGINALD

What?! How could that happen? How
could they possibly marry?

CHARLES

To what do you refer? Both were free to do so: he a bachelor, Susan a widow.

REGINALD

Sir James Martin is a fool.

CATHERINE

Well, a bit of a "rattle," perhaps.

REGINALD

A bit of a rattle? He's a complete blockhead!

CHARLES

Well, there are three possible explanations as I see it: first, perhaps Sir James has more merit than we've allowed--

REGINALD

No.

CHARLES

Second, perhaps, in order to secure your future, Frederica, your mother thought it necessary to make a prudent match herself.

FREDERICA

That could be the case. Mama has always been concerned for my future.

REGINALD

And the third possible explanation?

CHARLES

That she -- came to love him. There is a saying - "the heart has its strangeness," or words to that effect. The heart is an instrument we possess but do not truly know. Human love partakes of the divine, or at least has in my case.

Charles looks to Catherine who responds with a sweet smile.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

I believe you will find it in Rousseau's writings -- *Julie*, or *the New Heloise* I think.

(MORE)

CHARLES (CONT'D)

I will confirm the citation if you're interested.

REGINALD

I just find it incomprehensible that so brilliant a woman could marry such a pea brain... or peas brain.

CHARLES

This happens all the time.

Catherine smiles at him.

REGINALD

It strains credulity.

CHARLES

Certainly -- as you've said--
(nod to Catherine)
Sir James is no "Solomon," but if he can give Lady Susan the happiness and security which the sad events of recent years deprived her, then he's someone I and all of us should value.

FREDERICA

I very much agree, Uncle, we all should -- I wish them every happiness in their life together.

INT. EDWARD ST., MAIN PARLOR - DAY

Sir James Martin, in very good spirits, follows Alicia Johnson into the room.

ALICIA

I congratulate you, Sir James, on a match I long favored: there's a rightness to your being together -- not that any man could really deserve Lady Susan.

SIR JAMES

I agree most heartily... And I've the pleasure of adding that double congratulations are in order.

ALICIA

What?

SIR JAMES

The most beautiful woman in England
- present company excepted - will
soon be the most beautiful mother.
Yes, I'm to be a father.

ALICIA

Marvelous! You certainly don't
delay matters... Congratulations,
Sir!

The footman brings in the elaborate tea service; Alicia mixes
the tea.

SIR JAMES

Yes. The very morning after the
wedding Lady Susan hinted at the
happy news - which was shortly
confirmed.

ALICIA

How truly marvelous!

SIR JAMES

I'm as proud as you can imagine.

The sound of a wheezing sob off screen.

SIR JAMES (CONT'D)

What's that?

ALICIA

(whispers)

Such a burden. When Lord and Lady
Manwaring separated, Mr. Johnson --
who was Lucy Manwaring's guardian --
invited her to live with us.

SIR JAMES

Really? What upsets her?

ALICIA

The separation still. She keeps on
about it.

SIR JAMES

What?

ALICIA

All this carrying on about a
marriage that ended weeks ago. If a
woman fails to please her husband --
why go on about it, advertising
one's failure?

(MORE)

ALICIA (CONT'D)

Why announce to the world that the man who knows you best would rather be with someone else?

SIR JAMES

It seems as if Lady Manwaring has failed to consider the difference between the sexes. For a husband to wander is not the same as vice versa. If a husband strays, he's merely responds to his biology - that is how men are made.

(smiling complacently)

But for a woman to act in a similar way is ridiculous, unimaginable. Just the idea is funny:

(laughs)

Hew, hew, hew... hew, hew.

ALICIA

Oh yes -- couldn't agree more, quite funny: ha, ha, ha.

They sit. From the silver samovar Alicia pours the water over the tea.

SIR JAMES

I rather blame Lady Manwaring's scene-making for driving her husband away. But her loss has been our gain. As a result of all the trouble her solicitors caused, we've had him with us these past weeks.

ALICIA

That's not inconvenient?

SIR JAMES

Not at all. Capital fellow. Couldn't get on better -- loves to hunt, small and large game. Excellent to have a guest and the talk which comes with it. Of course Lady Susan's sharp but it's easier to talk with a fellow, particularly one who shares one's interests.... Before long we'll have another guest.

ALICIA

Frederica?

SIR JAMES
 (laughs)
 No. Of course, the baby.

The door bursts open - Lady Manwaring, distraught and disheveled, enters.

LADY MANWARING
 Manwaring? Manwaring? Have you seen
 my husband? What have you been
 saying, Sir? Tell me. How... is he?

SIR JAMES
 Well, Madam, very well, I believe.
 Couldn't be better.

Lady Manwaring leaves sobbing.

ALICIA
 Tea?

SIR JAMES
 Quite.

EXT. CHAPEL AT CHURCHILL -- DAY

As guests enter the chapel Sir James Martin's carriage pulls up. Sir James Martin, a very pregnant Lady Susan, and Manwaring alight from it, Sir James stepping slightly ahead:

SIR JAMES
 (pleased, then confused)
 So, here's the Church! But, where's
 the hill? Don't see it.
 (looking around)
 Doesn't seem to be one -- strange.
 Odd.

Sir James steps toward the portal as other guests enter the church. Manwaring looks handsome -- and content.

INT. CHAPEL AT CHURCHILL -- DAY

Immediately after the wedding, guests crowd around the portal holding the green garland arch. The crowd cheers & throws wheat as the newlyweds -- Frederica and Reginald -- pass beneath. LITTLE CHARLOTTE VERNON, advancing with her parents Catherine and Charles Vernon calls out to the couple:

LITTLE CHARLOTTE VERNON
 God bless you all!

INT. CHURCHILL, MAIN HALL -- DAY

The joyous arrival of wedding guests to the hall of Churchill for cake and further celebration, within which there are small groupings:

--A footman places a beautiful light blue wedding cake on the table.

--Frederica with Charles Vernon and Sir Reginald and Lady DeCourcy:

CHARLES

Your mother must be very proud.

FREDERICA

And I am enormously grateful to her. Without my mother's efforts I would never have found such happiness. Do excuse me.

--The Young Curate speaks with Catherine Vernon:

CURATE

Oh, no. That would be the Ninth.

--Lady Susan, Manwaring and Sir James Martin in another grouping:

SIR JAMES

You must be most proud of Frederica.

SUSAN

I would not say "proud" -- I am glad that I was able to attend to her Education. My daughter has shown herself to be cunning and manipulative -- I couldn't be more pleased: A Vernon will never go hungry.

Sir James raises a cheerful toast while Susan and Manwaring exchange a passionate glance.

--Sir Reginald and Lady DeCourcy with Charles Vernon:

LADY DECOURCY

We must ask Frederica to sing.

CHARLES

That would be delightful.

(confiding)

The "Surrey Songbird," we call her.

Sir Reginald seems irritated.

SIR REGINALD

What? No, she's the Kentish
Nightingale -- always call her
that. "Surrey Songbird" --
nonsense, rubbish... ridiculous.

Wilson the butler announces:

WILSON

Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Reginald
DeCourcy!

--The crowd turns to Reginald, standing with a beaming and
lovely Frederica:

REGINALD

Over the past months I have
continued to be startled by
Frederica's loveliness and good-
heart. I had wanted to write some
verses as a memorial to these
discoveries -- but they are now so
extensive they would form a volume
so I will just read these few
lines:

(reading from his notes)

*Blest tho' she is with ev'ry human
grace,
The mien ["mean"] engaging, and
bewitching face...*

Sir Reginald looks confused:

SIR REGINALD

"Mien engaging?"

CHARLES

Yes, "mien" -- appearance or
countenance -- from the French
"mine," I believe. I could find you
the reference.

On the raised steps Reginald completes reciting the verse to
Frederica:

REGINALD

*Yet still an higher beauty is her
care,
Virtue, the charm that most adorns
the fair.*

The crowd cheers -- various reaction shots from the other side of the room. Sir James Martin, particularly pleased, raises his glass in a toast, Lady Susan and Manwaring exchange a devoted look.

--On the raised steps now Frederica alone and a happy Reginald below continues:

FREDERICA

As you may already know I take Lady DeCourcy's requests as commands and therefore I will sing this piece...

The crowd gathers to hear.

FREDERICA (CONT'D)

(sings)

*Over the mountains
And over the waves,
Under the fountains
And under the graves,
Under floods that are deepest,
Which Neptune obey
Over rocks that are the steepest,
Love will find out the way.*

As Frederica sings, her voice beautiful, the reaction shots from all concerned, the very pregnant Lady Susan and others, ending with Sir Reginald and Lady DeCourcy's affectionate embrace.

FREDERICA (CONT'D)

*You may esteem him
A child for his might,
Or you may deem him
A coward from his flight.
But if she, whom Love doth honor,
Be concealed from the day
Set a thousand guards upon her,
Love will find out the way.*

*

As the music swells, credits roll.