

Scenes for Cold Readings

Silent Sky By Lauren Gunderson

When Henrietta Leavitt begins work at the Harvard Observatory in the early 1900s, she isn't allowed to touch a telescope or express an original idea. Instead, she joins a group of women "computers," charting the stars for a renowned astronomer who calculates projects in "girl hours" and has no time for the women's probing theories. As Henrietta, in her free time, attempts to measure the light and distance of stars, she must also take measure of her life on Earth, trying to balance her dedication to science with family obligations and the possibility of love. The true story of 19th-century astronomer Henrietta Leavitt explores a woman's place in society during a time of immense scientific discoveries, when women's ideas were dismissed until men claimed credit for them. Social progress, like scientific progress, can be hard to see when one is trapped among earthly complications; Henrietta Leavitt and her female peers believe in both, and their dedication changed the way we understand both the heavens and Earth.

Henrietta Leavitt - 30s, female, brilliant, meticulous, excited, almost always wearing a period hearing aid She is passionate about her work and feels compelled to find answers to her questions about the universe. (Historical figure)

Williamina Fleming -A former housekeeper for Dr. Pickering, head of the Harvard College Observatory, she was hired because Dr. Pickering felt she would do better than the men he had working for him. She is smart and quick-witted. (Historical figure)

Annie Jump Cannon - Henrietta's co-worker, she has made important scientific discoveries of her own and is a suffragette. (Historical figure)

Sherlock Holmes and The Suicide Club By Jeffrey Hatcher

It's 1914 and the game's afoot. Sherlock Holmes, solver of all mysteries great and small, cannot bear the thought that he might be losing his mental abilities. His dear friend, Dr. John H. Watson is understandably concerned: the great Sherlock Holmes...suicidal? In the foggy world of London's cobbled streets exists a group of kindred spirits with similar longings and intents. When Sherlock Holmes gets inducted into The Suicide Club, he quickly learns that there are men of greater station than he who wish to die. But is there someone helping them along more than it seems? When the odds of who lives and who dies and who will carry out the deed are determined by luck and chance, anything is possible. Or is it? Is the diabolical plan of the villain bigger than anything Sherlock Holmes has ever encountered before? The master of all detectives comes head-to-head with a puzzling mystery that questions the boundaries of friendship, love and murder.

Sherlock Holmes: The world's greatest detective, astute observer of detail.

Prince Nikita Starloff: An adopted "son" of the imperial family of Russia.

Club Secretary: A mysterious woman who conducts the secret meetings of The Suicide Club.

Lucy O'Malley: A madam.

Annie

Peter has been telling Henrietta how things work at the Harvard Observatory, but their meeting has become somewhat contentious. Annie steps in to take charge.

ANNIE. I'll take over, Mr. Shaw.

PETER. Yes — very good — Started to brief her.

ANNIE. Then I'd be brief.

PETER. Yes — well — Good day, ladies. *(To Henrietta.)* I'll see you ... around. *(He leaves. They look at Henrietta.)*

ANNIE. Annie Cannon.

HENRIETTA. Oh. Miss Cannon. I know that I probably shouldn't have gone on like that with him.

ANNIE. No you shouldn't.

HENRIETTA. And I'm sorry if I made a poor impression —

ANNIE. Harvard Observatory is the pinnacle of the astronomical community. The academic world looks to us.

HENRIETTA. To "bookkeep the stars," if you talk to Mr. Shaw.

ANNIE. Which is why we try not to talk to Mr. Shaw. We are mapping the sky, Miss Leavitt. If doing what has never been done before sounds unimportant to you, uninspired? I'd leave before you are asked to. Otherwise, show some respect.

HENRIETTA. Of course. And I would never —

ANNIE. Respect is a *quiet* thing, Miss Leavitt. Practice this.

HENRIETTA. Yes, Miss Cannon.

ANNIE. Practice now. *(Henrietta nods. Pause. Will holds up one of the photographic star plates.)*

WILLIAMINA. Let me show you what we do here, Miss Leavitt. This is the latest technology. A photograph of the stars. And we chart every point of light on every one.

ANNIE. Every single one.

WILLIAMINA. Every scattered sneeze of them.

ANNIE. *Will*, don't be crude

WILLIAMINA. They look like ground pepper till you get the hang of it.

ANNIE. Williamina is our best photometer, from whom you'll learn much if she doesn't get herself fired. *(Williamina smiles, Annie glares.)*

WILLIAMINA. I used to be her boss.

ANNIE. You still *are*. We share leadership of this department —

WILLIAMINA. She outdid me with those letters.

ANNIE. I did no such thing —

WILLIAMINA. The star classifications were her idea.

ANNIE. A *collective* effort, I assure you.

HENRIETTA. Star classifications? That's your work?

ANNIE. Let's get back to work please.

WILLIAMINA. *(To Henrietta — whispering.)* Because she's the boss.

ANNIE. *I wouldn't have to be if you'd take this seriously, which is a ridiculous request of a woman who started the department. (To Henrietta.)*

You know Will was the first woman to ever hold the title "curator" in astronomy? And the Draper Catalogue is *all* her work — She discovered stars, and nebulae, novae — She's the reason that I'm here, and even if she has far too much fun I am the first to admit that she is fundamental to this institution.

WILLIAMINA. *(To Henrietta.)* And that, new friend, is how you introduce yourself without boasting.

ANNIE. We have WORK. TO DO. And Dr. Pickering is a very particular man.

WILLIAMINA. He calls us his *harem*.

ANNIE. He's joking.

WILLIAMINA. He's not. He measures a project in "girl hours."

ANNIE. He's joking.

WILLIAMINA. He's not. Sometimes "kilo-girl hours."

ANNIE. The point is, we're busy because we're essential.

HENRIETTA. And what about working on our own ideas? Using the telescope for our own work?

ANNIE. You don't.

HENRIETTA. Oh. But I thought this was — ?

ANNIE. We collect, report, and maintain the largest stellar archive in the world. And we resist the temptation to analyze it.

WILLIAMINA. Resisting doesn't always work.

ANNIE. Can you do this job, Miss Leavitt?

HENRIETTA. Of course I can.

ANNIE. I need the consistent, not the creative.

WILLIAMINA. She can do it, Annie. She understands.

ANNIE. Good. Please show Miss Leavitt to her station.

WILLIAMINA. Will do, Mr. President.

ANNIE. You make me crazy and you know you make me crazy.

MARGARET

Henrietta stands looking at the sky. She is outside her father's rural Wisconsin church. It is cold. Her sister Margaret approaches her from behind and pinches her.

MARGARET. You know church is about to start. You know this and you're avoiding it and you've been caught.

HENRIETTA. I haven't been caught, I've been attacked.

MARGARET. With love.

HENRIETTA. With pinches. What kind of world is this.

MARGARET. You're not wearing your hearing-aid, you're fair game. Church. Now.

HENRIETTA. I can't right now.

MARGARET. Oh yes you can, We're Waiting I'm freezing Come In.

HENRIETTA. Margie, I'm sorry but I cannot sit still right now.

MARGARET. The only thing you have to do in church is sit still. Now tell me what's going on or come inside.

HENRIETTA. I've been trying to tell you all week but you're busy and you're barking and —

MARGARET. Why are we still outside?!

HENRIETTA. *Because.* They have a job for me at Harvard.

MARGARET. Since when were you even looking for a job.

HENRIETTA. Since they offered.

MARGARET. Harvard asked *you*?

HENRIETTA. Yes and please don't hold back your tone of shock.

MARGARET. This is shocking — I am shocked.

HENRIETTA. And I'm ... leaving.

MARGARET. You've always been leaving.

HENRIETTA. Next week.

MARGARET. Next...? Oh Henri. Now wait. We need to discuss this as a family.

HENRIETTA. Margie, this could be my best life and it's right in front of me.

MARGARET. And I'm still freezing. (*Turns to go.*)

HENRIETTA. Margie, talk to me —

MARGARET. Fine — yes — I know that we were never going to be grow-old-next-to-each-other kind of sisters, and the way you drive me crazy makes that for the best — but — Henrietta this is extreme.

HENRIETTA. Exactly. Come with me. (*Small pause.*)

MARGARET. Oh, Henri, please.

HENRIETTA. Both of us. Come on.

MARGARET. What are you talking about? That's absurd.

HENRIETTA. The edge of the wide world!

MARGARET. It's Boston.

HENRIETTA. You don't have to stay here. You can be happy, you can loose yourself —

MARGARET. *Loose* my — ? No. Stop. Do not start wearing bloomers.

HENRIETTA. Margie.

MARGARET. *Wait.* There are women these days, and they wear pants, and it's ridiculous. Now I have to play the hymns for the service that started ten minutes ago, and thank you, sister, my fingers are numb.

HENRIETTA. *I need you to convince Daddy to give me my dowry. (This stops Margie cold.)* I'm serious. Very. Please talk to him.

MARGARET. *Why do I get all the yelling jobs?*

HENRIETTA. You're so good at it.

MARGARET. This is your future, Henrietta. You know for certain that you'll never marry, you'll never fall in love — people do that. Uncoordinated, unplanned emotion — Just the word "spinster," Henrietta, please.

HENRIETTA. I need to start my life ... with Daddy's money.

MARGARET. Next the bloomers. Whiskey with suffragettes.

HENRIETTA. I'm not a cowboy.

MARGARET. *It starts with pants.* It's a changing world. And some things should be sacred. And I'm not saying you shouldn't go — but I worry. It's far away, that place, and it's crowded, and you're still here in my sight and I worry.

HENRIETTA. I'll be doing math. Don't worry.

MARGARET. Why not stay here and live with us and ... teach?

HENRIETTA. No.

MARGARET. Like every other girl with your temperament.

HENRIETTA. Margie, come with me.

MARGARET. *I can't.*

HENRIETTA. Why not?

MARGARET. Because Father counts on me, and if you leave I can't leave, and I don't want to leave and ... Samuel proposed.

Williamina

Williamina and Annie are introducing Henrietta to the Harvard Observatory and explaining their work to her.

WILLIAMINA. Let me show you what we do here, Miss Leavitt. This is the latest technology. A photograph of the stars. And we chart every point of light on every one.

ANNIE. Every single one.

WILLIAMINA. Every scattered sneeze of them.

ANNIE. *Will*, don't be crude

WILLIAMINA. They look like ground pepper till you get the hang of it.

ANNIE. Williamina is our best photometer, from whom you'll learn much if she doesn't get herself fired. (*Williamina smiles, Annie glares.*)

WILLIAMINA. I used to be her boss.

ANNIE. You still *are*. We share leadership of this department —

WILLIAMINA. She outdid me with those letters.

ANNIE. I did no such thing —

WILLIAMINA. The star classifications were her idea.

HENRIETTA. Star classifications? That's your work?

WILLIAMINA. Oh yes indeed, the sky was a riot until Miss Cannon coded it. *I* wanted to give every star a number based on color — but *she* insisted on labeling stars with *letters* based on *temperature* —

ANNIE. OBAFGKM.

WILLIAMINA. She also made up that ridiculous phrase.

HENRIETTA. "Oh Be A Fine Girl, Kiss Me."

WILLIAMINA. She thought it would be best for the boys. That's all they think about anyway.

ANNIE. We have WORK. TO DO. And Dr. Pickering is a very particular man.

WILLIAMINA. He calls us his *harem*.

ANNIE. He's joking.

WILLIAMINA. He's not. He measures a project in "girl hours."

ANNIE. He's joking.

WILLIAMINA. He's not. Sometimes "kilo-girl hours."

ANNIE. The point is, we're busy because we're essential.

WILLIAMINA. We're the dirt. (*Annie glares. Correcting ...*) From which mighty oaks grow.

HENRIETTA. And do we have a title of some sort?

WILLIAMINA. We do indeed. Congratulations, Miss Leavitt, you are now a computer.

ANNIE. One who computes.

WILLIAMINA. Notate the plates, transfer the data, input the data, process, record, next star.

ANNIE. Can you do this job, Miss Leavitt?

WILLIAMINA. She can do it, Annie. She understands.

ANNIE. Good. Please show Miss Leavitt to her station.

WILLIAMINA. Will do, Mr. President.

ANNIE. You make me crazy and you know you make me crazy.

WILLIAMINA. Balance of power, darling. (*Annie exits.*) Alright, you. More questions?

HENRIETTA. Is she mean or just to me?

WILLIAMINA. Oh nono. She's just meticulous. And blunt. And she sings.

HENRIETTA. Sings what?

WILLIAMINA. Like a crow, but still. Shows her humanity — atonal though it may be. You want her on your side. She's always on the right one.

HENRIETTA. Good. Because I have some pressing issues with ... science.

WILLIAMINA. The whole of it?

HENRIETTA. A lot of it.

WILLIAMINA. You're fun. But here's some perspective. I was Pickering's housekeeper before he brought me here. So we're a lot of things, but at present we are cleaning up the universe for the men. And making fun of them behind their backs. It's worked for centuries. (*Annie enters with more plates.*)

ANNIE. Working isn't talking.

WILLIAMINA. Oh Henrietta. It's just life. Ridiculous and miraculous and often not funny at all. But better when you're laughing. Especially husbands.

ANNIE. She had one.

WILLIAMINA. I did. Abandoned me as soon as we docked in Boston. I was 21, pregnant, poor, and Scottish. So I laughed. Found my way to Dr. Pickering, worked his house as a maid, he brought me here, and here I sit. So I laugh, because that seemed to work.

Peter

After an awkward meeting and a somewhat contentious working relationship over several years, Peter finally reveals his true feelings for Henrietta.

PETER. Hello. I just came by for my ... hat.

HENRIETTA. Oh.

PETER. My gloves — left my gloves —

HENRIETTA. Mr. Shaw, I know I shouldn't be here this late.

PETER. Actually I'd prefer it — much prefer it if you called me by my given name. Peter. Would be — nicer, nice.

HENRIETTA. Oh. Henrietta.

PETER. Good. (*Takes his gloves out of his pocket.*) Found them. (*Starts to go but doesn't —*) Miss — Henrietta — I — I don't know anything about you really and — and that's a shame. So. Might I know something about you? Now. Would be nice.

HENRIETTA. I play the clarinet. Not well.

PETER. I play also. Also not well.

HENRIETTA. Then we could be terrible together! I mean —

PETER. There's an ocean liner leaving tomorrow — You should be on it — I'll be on it — I'm saying come with me — to Europe — For a month — or two? You don't have to decide now — but close to now because the liner leaves tomorrow — I said that — Pack warmly — cold at night — We might stop in Spain — And there's dancing and lobster and water and moonlight and bobbing around and that's romantic — or sickening — Either way there'll be an eclipse. Which is fun.

HENRIETTA. I ... oh my ... yes, that sounds ... very interesting.

PETER. Interesting?

HENRIETTA. Incredible.

PETER. Oh good.

HENRIETTA. If it weren't on a boat.

PETER. You don't like boats? I didn't think of that.

HENRIETTA. No, I just can't leave my work. I'm very close to something and —

PETER. But we could meet astronomers all over Europe. Talk about your ideas. See the world!

HENRIETTA. Peter.

PETER. This is a rather large moment for me so I just want to be clear because it took me three years to get this far. So. Your mind and spirit ... I quite adore ... those things ... about you. And I don't expect you to reciprocate immediately or at all, but I feared combusting if I didn't tell you that you've been the brightest object in my day since we met. And we work with stars. And I know I haven't been the most emotive suitor but I have been a thoughtful one, and I hope that counts for something. And I also hope I do not offend you by expressing how very deeply I ... admire you.

HENRIETTA. Well. I think it's an accurate statement to say that I ... approve.

PETER. You do? That's just tremendous. And a bit shocking, I thought I might have ruined it with that first impression. Or the second. Or this one.

HENRIETTA. Fortune favors the unashamed. But. My work is very important to me and if there is any resistance to that then you might reconsider your adoration promptly.

PETER. I couldn't reconsider if I tried. I know you and I know your work and ... if you can't go with me, I'll stay. Because I cannot walk away from this.

HENRIETTA. What *is* this exactly?

PETER. Well it's — it's love right?

HENRIETTA. I don't know. Is it?

PETER. It's got to be. My heart's beating like a train. That's your fault.

HENRIETTA. *My* fault?! It's *your* fault.

PETER. Yes! See? Love!

HENRIETTA. How, God, *how* do you know that?

PETER. Comparative analysis. Before you: content. After you? Passionate, confident ... idiot. Rounds? Please. An ocean liner?

Nicky / Holmes / Lucy

ACT I, Scene 7 page 1 of 4

CLUB SECRETARY (CONT'D)

One of you now possesses the red billiard. When you leave the premises you will follow Mr. George into the night and relieve his suffering. Mr. Edwards, no offer this evening?

HOLMES

No, Club Secretary. Unless it is to move we adjourn.

CLUB SECRETARY

All in favor say aye.

MEMBERS

Aye.

CLUB SECRETARY

Meeting adjourned.

As the others exit, HOLMES and NICKY speak
sotto voce.

HOLMES

Did you get the red?

NICKY

No.

HOLMES

Then go!

HOLMES and NICKY exit in opposite
directions.

END OF SCENE 6

SCENE 7: THE STREETS OF SOHO

PROJECTION: THE FOG-BOUND
STREETS OF LONDON

MR. GEORGE, in cape, top hat and cane,
enters. He's wide-eyed, frightened.

SOUND: A HUMAN WHISTLE

MR. GEORGE disappears into the darkness.

Nicky / Holmes / Lucy
ACT I, scene 7 page 2 of 4

HOLMES enters and whistles three times.

A FIGURE in top hat, cape and cane enters from the shadows and comes up behind HOLMES. We should think it is the threatening form of Mr. George, but when HOLMES turns to see who's behind him, we reveal it is NICKY.

NICKY

Were you able to follow him?

HOLMES

No. Mr. George has the advantage of fear. He is running for his life.

LUCY O'MALLEY, a shabby, overdressed and over made-up painted lady, enters.

LUCY

'Allo, ducks. Want a lifelong friend for five minutes?

HOLMES

It's all right, Mrs. O'Malley, come forth. Mrs. O'Malley runs an establishment in the West End that employs two dozen young ladies. She has been kind enough to put them at our disposal this evening.

LUCY

Bought out the house did Mr. Holmes.

NICKY

Twenty-four women from one house of...?

HOLMES

Yes, think of the disappointed men throughout the city tonight. Did you do as we discussed?

LUCY

Yes, sir, Mr. Holmes. Two girls on the first fellow out the door--

HOLMES

Mr. George.

LUCY

Two on the second fellow, cape was covered with chalk or some such.

Nicky / Holmes / Lucy
ACT 1, scene 7 page 3 of 4

HOLMES

Powdered sugar. That's Mr. Williams. Next?

LUCY

Two on the third, an elderly bloke in a wheelchair.

HOLMES

Mr. Henry.

LUCY

(re: NICKY)

And two on this one.

NICKY

What?

HOLMES

Just a formality. The first gentleman, Mr. George, where did he go?

LUCY

Fast walker, that one, but I had me two best girls on him all the way down Charing Cross to Regent Street, right into Carlton Terrace. Which is where they lost him.

HOLMES

How is this possible?

LUCY

You know how we follow 'em, one girl on one side of the street, one girl on the opposite, the closest takes the lead. Well, both of my girls thought the other was in the lead. Each of 'em swore on a stack she saw the other girl with him. So they *both* fell back, and next thing they knew he was around the corner and gone.

LIGHTS UP ON MR. GEORGE in his cape, top hat and cane. He turns to face us.

SOUND: TRAFFIC. Carriages, etc.

PROJECTION: CHARING CROSS ROAD, crowded with pedestrians, carriages, and cabs.

MR. GEORGE vanishes into darkness.

BLACKOUT

HOLMES

Your report, please.

(gets a slip from her)

Mrs. O'Malley, you may relieve your ladies.

Nicky / Holmes / Lucy
ACT I, Scene 7 page 4 of 4

LUCY nods and exits.

NICKY

So. Tonight has been a failure?

HOLMES

(a glint in his eyes)

The night is young.

NICKY exits.

HOLMES lingers a moment, as if sensing some presence. Then he exits.

A FIGURE enters from the shadows, watching him go. He comes into the light. It is DR. WATSON. He hurries off into the dark.

END OF SCENE 7

SCENE 8: THE SAVOY HOTEL - NICKY'S SUITE

PROJECTION: SAVOY HOTEL AWNING

NICKY, in a smoking jacket, enters with HOLMES.

NICKY

Did you sleep after our adventures of last night?

HOLMES

I never sleep during a case. Forthwith, the results of my endeavours:

A LIGHT ON - MR. WILLIAMS.

HOLMES (CONT'D)

Last night, Mrs. O'Malley's ladies followed Mr. Williams to the rail hotel at Paddington, where a few well-placed questions revealed that our gentleman of the cream tarts is registered there under the name G. Edgerton, leading me to suspect he is in fact The Honorable *Gerald* Edgerton, son of Lord Edgerton, the late press baron whose death last November made his sole offspring heir to the largest newspaper chain in the world.

LIGHT OFF - MR. WILLIAMS.

Mr. Roundy / Holmes

ACT I, scene 9 page 1 of 3

CHRISTIANE

What?

HOLMES

His profession.

NICKY

What is odd about a cultural attache?

HOLMES

There's no such thing.

CHRISTIANE and NICKY exit.

END OF SCENE 8

SCENE 9: "J. ROUNDY & SON CHEMISTS"

PROJECTION: ILLUSTRATION OF A
PERIOD CHEMISTS SHOP

HOLMES puts on an Inverness coat and
deerstalker and pops a *pince-nez* on his nose to
assume the demeanor of a pedant.

MR. ROUNDY, a pharmacist enters.

MR. ROUNDY

Well, well, a monograph for the Journal of the Royal Chemistry Society. This is quite
flattering, Mr. ..er..

HOLMES

Trott, Hezekiah Trott. Yes, the piece is on the unintended consequences of chemical
reactions. I happened to come across your pharmacy by way of an obituary in the
"Daily Telegraph."

MR. ROUNDY

Ah, yes, the Christmas gentleman. That was a terribly unintended chemical reaction.

HOLMES

Is it too, too horrid to recall?

MR. ROUNDY

Mr. Roundy / Holmes

ACT I scene 9

page 2 of 3

Not at all! I was standing on this very spot near onto closing when in comes this gentleman, very urgent and out of breath, with a prescription to fill. I turn round to hand it to my assistant when suddenly there's this crash. The gentleman had jostled two bottles off the shelf.

HOLMES

You saw him do this?

MR. ROUNDY

Heard. By the time the fumes dissipated, the gentleman had succumbed. Fortunately, he was the only one who did.

HOLMES

There were others in the shop at the time?

MR. ROUNDY

A lady, yes, and my assistant.

HOLMES

What were the chemicals that created this deadly eruption?

MR. ROUNDY

One bottle was chloryl acidate, the other methyl pyrene.

HOLMES

But surely chloryl acidate and methyl pyrene wouldn't have been set *near* each other, let alone side by side.

MR. ROUNDY

Perish the notion.

HOLMES

Then jostling them both at the same time must have been quite a trick. You don't think that the mixing of the two could have been intentional.

MR. ROUNDY

No. The labels on the bottles display only their chemical markings. The general public wouldn't know *what* was inside.

HOLMES

You say he gave you a prescription to fill. Do you still have it?

MR. ROUNDY

Oh, yes, but I warn you, it makes no sense.

Mr. Roundy / Holmes
ACT I, scene 9

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HOLMES

Is it the handwriting ?

MR. ROUNDY

Actually the handwriting is quite legible, for a prescription.

HOLMES

It's not written on a prescription form.

MR. ROUNDY

Half the physicians I deal with just grab a scrap of butcher's paper and scribble away. No, the bizarre part is there. Do you see the doctor's name?

PROJECTION: THE PRESCRIPTION

HECTOR M. O'FLY M.S.

BOUND'S ICE GELS

HOLMES

"Hector M. O'Fly M.S." Master of Surgery?

MR. ROUNDY

In seventeen years I've never laid eyes on a prescription from a surgeon. So I thought I'd better check the Physician's Registry. There was no listing for a Dr. O'Fly, not in the whole of London, nor anywhere else, I might add.

HOLMES

Just what are "Bound's Ice Gels?"

MR. ROUNDY

I thought it might be something from America - well, it has the *sound* - but it's not. It isn't a medicinal product of any kind.

HOLMES

So, what in fact is it?

MR. ROUNDY

A mystery!

END OF SCENE 9

SCENE 10: THE DIOGENES CLUB

PROJECTION: DIOGENES CLUB LOGO

CHARACTERS

ELINOR DASHWOOD — the eldest Dashwood sister; sensible.

MARIANNE DASHWOOD — the middle Dashwood sister;
sensitive.

MARGARET DASHWOOD — the youngest Dashwood sister;
10–13 years old.

MRS. DASHWOOD — mother to the Dashwood sisters.

JOHN DASHWOOD — half-brother to the Dashwood sisters
(from their father's side; no blood relation to Mrs. Dashwood).

EDWARD FERRARS — a gentleman; a bachelor.

FANNY (FERRARS) DASHWOOD — wife to John Dashwood
and sister to Edward; nasty.

COLONEL BRANDON — an older bachelor; over 45 years old.

JOHN WILLOUGHBY — an unusually handsome young man.

SIR JOHN MIDDLETON — a country gentleman; distant
relation to Mrs. Dashwood.

MRS. JENNINGS — a good-natured, boisterous woman;
mother-in-law to Sir John and a terror to the countryside.

LADY MIDDLETON — an over-bred lady.

LUCY STEELE — a young girl from no fortune.

ANNE STEELE — Lucy's sister; indiscreet.

ROBERT FERRARS — a callow young man; Edward Ferrars'
younger brother.

Also, to be doubled with the cast:

GOSSIPS 1–5 — a chorus of high-society creatures.

SERVANTS — including THOMAS.

DOCTOR

PLACE & TIME

England, 1790s.

NOTE

This play may be performed with as little or as much in the way of set, props, or spectacle as you prefer — in Bedlam's world premiere, it was ingeniously staged with a few pieces of simple furniture. I encourage you to be as creative as you wish; it's meant to be a bit of a funhouse! Doubling is also encouraged; the only characters that absolutely should not be doubled are Elinor and Marianne, as the "sense" and "sensibility" foci of the piece. The Gossips may be assigned as needed. Have fun — Jane Austen would approve.

MARIANNE. Oh, Elinor! I am unwell. I am very unwell. (*The room resounds with whispers. The Gossip's dance may become more and more vicious, until there is a climax of rumors, motion, and noise. Elinor, shielding Marianne, flees the scene.*)

The Morning After

The next morning, in the Dashwoods' room at Mrs. Jennings' London house. Marianne and Elinor are both asleep, still in their clothes. A knock on the door wakes them up.

MRS. JENNINGS. My dear Miss Marianne, I have something from a certain special someone, which I am sure you will find to your liking! (*Marianne jumps up from the bed and flies to the door, grabbing the letter and running back to the bed. Elinor, just behind her, swiftly blocks the doorway.*) I never saw a young woman so desperately in love in my life! Pray, when are they to be married?

ELINOR. You don't really, Ma'am, believe that my sister is engaged to Mr. Willoughby! I always thought you were only joking.

MRS. JENNINGS. For shame, Miss Elinor! How can you talk so? We all know that they were madly in love with each other from the first moment they met! Because you are so sly about it personally, you think nobody else has any sense, but I tell you all society knows of it from here to Devonshire and back again. I tell everybody of it, myself!

ELINOR. Indeed, ma'am, you are mistaken. And you are doing a very unkind thing in spreading the report.

MRS. JENNINGS. Yes, yes. You are a very clever and subtle creature, Miss Elinor. Mum's the word until the banns are read, hey? (*Winking broadly.*) I am off to visit my Charlotte, but have asked Susan to lay out a nice breakfast for you two to stuff yourselves! Ta-ta! (*Elinor rushes back into the bedroom, where Marianne sits, holding the letter. She reads the letter out loud.*)

ELINOR. "My dear madam, I gather that something in my behavior last night did not meet with your approval, although I am at a loss as to how I offended you. Allow me to be plain: I am sorry if you ever mistook my friendship for something more, but you must acknowledge

that anything of that nature is and has been impossible — as my affections have long been engaged with another young lady. John Willoughby."

MARIANNE. Elinor, what shall I do? What shall I do? (*Getting hysterical.*)

ELINOR. Marianne, please! Try to stay calm!

MARIANNE. How can I be calm?!!

ELINOR. What good does it do to become hysterical?!

MARIANNE. Leave me if it upsets you so much!

ELINOR. Do not indulge in this display!

MARIANNE. Leave me, hate me, forget me! But do not ask me not to feel!

ELINOR. Marianne, it might have been worse! Your engagement could have gone on much longer before he ended it!

MARIANNE. What engagement?

ELINOR. You weren't engaged?! But Marianne, you *wrote* to him!

MARIANNE. Leave me alone, leave me alone! (*She sobs. Mrs. Jennings, without knocking, hurries in. The Gossips crowd outside the door.*)

MRS. JENNINGS. How do you do, my dear? (*Marianne howls.*)

Poor thing, she looks very bad. — And no wonder, it is but too true.

He is to be married very soon. Mrs. Taylor told me of it downstairs, and I almost sank on the spot! Well, said I, if this is true, he has used a young lady of my acquaintance abominably ill, and I wish with all my soul his wife may plague his heart out. But he is not the only man in the world worth having, Miss Marianne! You will soon be beating them back with a stout stick! (*Marianne half-screams.*) Yes, have your little cry out. (*Moving away from the bed; to Elinor, in a not-quiet stage whisper.*) Luckily, the Parrys and Sandersons are coming tonight, and that will amuse her!

ELINOR. (*Attempts to usher her out of the room.*) Dear ma'am, I am sure Marianne will not leave her room today.

MRS. JENNINGS. I cannot believe that a man should use a pretty girl so ill! But when there is plenty of money on one side, and none on the other ...

ELINOR. The lady then — is very rich?

MRS. JENNINGS. Fifty thousand pounds, my dear. The young Miss Grey — a stylish girl they say, but not handsome. Fifty thousand pounds! And it won't come before it's wanted, for they say he is all to pieces! Well, 'tis a true saying about an ill-wind, for it will be all the better for Colonel Brandon! How he'll chuckle over this news!

They'll be married by Mid-summer. I shall spirit him up as soon as I can — maybe he'll come tonight. One shoulder of mutton, you know, drives another down! *(She scampers off. Elinor turns back into the room and approaches the bed.)*

MARIANNE. All she wants is gossip, and she only likes me because I supply her with it.

ELINOR. Marianne.

MARIANNE. I do not want to talk.

ELINOR. I will leave you, if you will promise to rest. *(Marianne pulls the covers over her head. Mrs. Jennings knocks at the door.)*

MRS. JENNINGS. I recollected that I had some fine old Constantia wine in the house, so I have brought a glass of it for your sister. My poor husband was very fond of it whenever he had a touch of his gout.

ELINOR. How good you are, ma'am. *(Mrs. Jennings slips off. Elinor looks at Marianne, who is still under the covers, and tosses off the wine herself.)*

Colonel Brandon's Revelation

The next morning. Elinor sits and attempts to compose herself in the drawing room. She begins to write to her mother.

SERVANT. Colonel Brandon, miss. *(Elinor hurriedly hides the letter and smooths her hair. Colonel Brandon enters.)*

ELINOR. I am afraid Mrs. Jennings is away from home, Colonel.

COL. BRANDON. And your sister?

ELINOR. Marianne is ... unwell.

COL. BRANDON. Perhaps, then, what I heard this morning — there may be more truth in it than I thought possible.

ELINOR. What did you hear?

COL. BRANDON. It concerned a certain gentleman.

ELINOR. You mean Mr. Willoughby's sudden engagement to Miss Grey. Have you also heard that Miss Grey has fifty thousand pounds?

COL. BRANDON. ... How is your sister?

ELINOR. Her sufferings have been very severe.

COL. BRANDON. Miss Dashwood, I may be able to offer some

comfort — no, not comfort, but I may be able to relate some — history about Mr. Willoughby which may bring some ... clarity.

ELINOR. Please go on.

COL. BRANDON. You may find me a very awkward narrator.

ELINOR. Please.

COL. BRANDON. In my youth, I knew a lady who ... was very like your sister Marianne, both in person and in temperament. I loved her, and she loved me in return — but Eliza had no fortune, and I was a young man with no independence and no occupation. I was under my father's power. *(Beat.)* He forbade the match, of course. A marriage of that kind was impossible, he said, unthinkable — and though I protested violently, I am ashamed to say that he won his point at the last. Threatened with disinheritance and disownment, I faltered. And Eliza was sent away. *(Pause.)* At seventeen, I was also shipped off to my regiment in the East Indies, and there lost contact with Eliza entirely. A man came along, and treated her kindly for a time ... and then another, and then another. I returned to England a grown man, independent — and determined to find her. By the time I did, she was dying in the poorhouse, her infant by her side. You may have heard some rumors about my ward, Miss Jane Williams. She is Eliza's daughter, whom I swore to look after as my own. That was fifteen years ago. Last February, Jane suddenly disappeared from her boarding school; for months, I could not find her. Finally, I received a letter from her — on that evening I left Barton so suddenly. In it, she did not name the man who had seduced her — his luck, for I would have done him violence at the table, even as he basked in your sister's smiles.

ELINOR. Mr. Willoughby.

COL. BRANDON. He left Jane in a situation of the utmost distress, with no home, no help, no friends, ignorant of his whereabouts. She is fifteen. And now she is with child.

ELINOR. This is beyond everything!

COL. BRANDON. When I came to you last week, I thought that all was settled between your sister and Mr. Willoughby. I did not know how I could stop the marriage without heaping scandal upon both her and my poor Jane.

ELINOR. Who knows what his designs on Marianne were!

COL. BRANDON. I promise you, Miss Dashwood, if I did not from my heart believe that this might eventually lessen Miss Marianne's regrets, I would never have burdened you with such troubling

telling Isaiah yesterday when he come using it in front of me—I said, "Isaiah, it's just like Mis' Younger come all the time—"]

MAMA. Don't you want some more pie?

JOHNSON. No—no thank you; this was lovely. I got to get on over home and have my midnight coffee. *(A beat. She waits to be served it. When she isn't.)* I hear some people say it don't let them sleep but I finds I can't close my eyes right lessen I done had that laaaast cup of coffee... *(She waits. A beat. Undaunted.)* My Goodnight coffee, I calls it!

MAMA. *(with much eye-rolling and communication between herself and RUTH)* Ruth, why don't you give Mis' Johnson her Goodnight coffee.

(RUTH looks up from the paper and gives MAMA an unpleasant look for her kindness.)

JOHNSON. *(accepting the coffee which RUTH pours without friendliness)* Where's Brother tonight?

MAMA. He's lying down.

JOHNSON. MMmmmm, he sure gets his beauty rest, don't he? Good-looking man. Sure is a good-looking man! *(reaching out to pat RUTH's stomach again)* I guess that's how come we keep on having babies around here. *(She winks at MAMA, who dislikes her vulgarity and looks away.)* One thing 'bout Brother, he always know how to have a good time. And soooooo ambitious! I bet it was his idea y'all moving out to Clybourne Park. Lord—I bet this time next month y'all's names will have been in the papers plenty. *(holding up her hands to mark off each word of the headline she can see in front of her)* ~~NEGROES INVADE CLYBOURNE PARK—BOMBED!~~

MAMA. *(She and RUTH look at the woman in amazement.)* We ain't exactly moving out there to get bombed.

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JOHNSON. Oh, honey—you know I'm praying to God every day that don't nothing like that happen! But you have to think of life like it is—and these here Chicago peckerwoods is some baaaad peckerwoods.

MAMA. *(wearily)* We done thought about all that, Mis' Johnson.

(BENEATHA comes out of the bedroom in her robe and passes through to the bathroom. MRS. JOHNSON turns.)

JOHNSON. Hello there, Bennie!

BENEATHA. *(crisply)* Hello, Mrs. Johnson.

JOHNSON. How is school?

BENEATHA. *(crisply)* Fine, thank you. *(She goes out.)*

JOHNSON. *(insulted)* Getting so she don't have much to say to nobody.

MAMA. The child was on her way to the bathroom.

JOHNSON. I know—but sometimes she act like ain't got time to pass the time of day with nobody ain't been to college. Oh—I ain't criticizing her none. [It's just—you know how some of our young people gets when they get a little education. *(MAMA and RUTH say nothing, just look at her.)* Yes—well. Well, I guess I better get on home. *(unmoving)* 'Course] I can understand how she must be proud and everything—being the only one in the family to make something of herself! I know just being a chauffeur ain't never satisfied Brother none. He shouldn't feel like that, though. Ain't nothing wrong with being a chauffeur.

MAMA. There's plenty wrong with it.

JOHNSON. What?

MAMA. Plenty. My husband always said being any kind of a servant wasn't a fit thing for a man to have to be. He always said a man's hands was made to make

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things, or to turn the earth with—not to drive nobody's car for 'em—or—(She looks at her own hands.) carry they slop jars. And my boy is just like him—he wasn't meant to wait on nobody.

JOHNSON. (rising, somewhat offended) Mmmmm mmmm. The Youngers is too much for me! (She looks around.) You sure one proud-acting bunch of colored folks. Well—[I always thinks like Booker T. Washington said that time—"Education has spoiled many a good plow hand"—

MAMA. Is that what old Booker T. said?

JOHNSON. He sure did.

MAMA. Well, it sounds just like him. (A beat. With flavor)

The fool.

JOHNSON. (indignantly) Well—he was one of our great men.

MAMA. Who said so?

JOHNSON. (nonplussed) You know, me and you ain't never agreed about some things, Lena Younger.] I guess I better be going—

RUTH. (quickly) Good night.

JOHNSON. Good night. Oh—(thrusting it at her) You can keep the paper! (a beat; with a trill) Nighty-night.

MAMA. Good night, Mis' Johnson.

(MRS. JOHNSON exits.)

RUTH. If ignorance was gold . . .

MAMA. Shush. Don't talk about folks behind their backs.

RUTH. You do.

MAMA. I'm old and corrupted. (BENEATHA enters.) You was rude to Mis' Johnson, Beneatha, and I don't like it at all.

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BENEATHA. (at her door) Mama, if there are two things we, as a people, have got to overcome, one is the Ku Klux Klan—and the other is (a beat) Wilhemenia Othella Johnson! (She exits.)

MAMA. Smart aleck.

End,

(The phone rings.)

RUTH. I'll get it.

MAMA. Lord, ain't this a popular place tonight.

Act Two, Scene 2 now continues with Ruth's phone conversation on p. 87.

II

This sequence follows Beneatha's line, "Yes—really," on page 46, line 10:

(There is a sudden commotion from the street and BENEATHA goes to the window to look out.)

BENEATHA. What on earth is going on out there. These kids! (There are, as she throws open the window, the shouts of children rising up from below. She sticks her head out to see better and calls out.) TRAVIS! TRAVIS! . . . WHAT ARE YOU DOING DOWN THERE? (She sees.) Oh, Lord, they're chasing a rat!

(RUTH covers her face with hands and turns away.)

MAMA. (angrily.) Tell that youngun to get himself up here, at once!

BENEATHA. TRAVIS . . . YOU COME UPSTAIRS . . . AT ONCE!

RUTH. (her face twisted) Chasing a rat . . .

MAMA. (looking at RUTH, worried) Don't say every thing going to be all right!