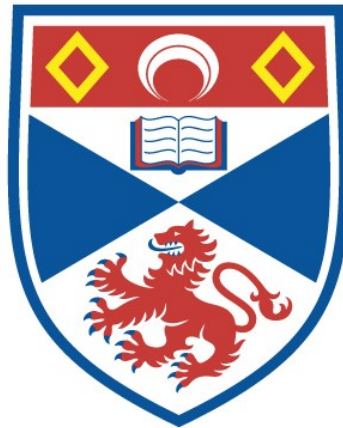


Follies & f*ckups

Nicole Gabrione

A thesis submitted for the degree of MFA
at the
University of St Andrews



2024

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ABSTRACT:

*Follies & F*ckups* is a comedy that both engages with and makes fun of the tropes and manners of both Jane Austen's novels and contemporary Regency romances, such as the *Bridgerton* novels and television show. The goal of this thesis was to make use of all the skills I acquired during this course, specifically: meaningful characterization, appropriately motivated dialogue and speech, and satisfying plotting. My purpose was to create a play that uses laughter and jokes to both reveal the characters that speak them and delight the audience. The ultimate goal is for *Follies & F*ckups* to be as satisfying and enjoyable to perform as it is to watch.

FOLLIES & F*CKUPS

CHARACTERS:

Archibald

Euphemia

Maggie

Lydia

Ashford

Winters

Lucy

Richards

And others, to be divided amongst members of the company.

SETTING:

Godfrey Hall, a large estate in Kent, and the surrounding land.

NOTES:

A “/” indicates where the next line of dialogue begins.

*Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.*

- Mary Oliver, *Wild Geese*

You are the bane of my existence and the object of all my desires.

- Bridgerton season 2 episode 5

PROLOGUE.

Jaunty string quartet. It's a period drama, baby!

Enter ARCHIBALD and EUPHEMIA.

ARCHIBALD

Ah, Kent! The Garden of England! The Florida of London.

EUPHEMIA

Idyllic countryside, stunning sea views,

ARCHIBALD

And miles upon miles of uninterrupted elderly people.

EUPHEMIA

Kent really is one of the most beautiful places in the country.

ARCHIBALD

Observe, if you will, the graceful wild deer wandering the rolling hills!

EUPHEMIA

Observe, if you dare, the graceful wild deer being violently gunned down by a party of men in tailored waistcoats!

ARCHIBALD

This, my friends, is the sexy sexy polarity that makes Kent so romantic.

EUPHEMIA

After all, this is England, eighteen-*(mumble)*, and everyone's looking for that Regency love story.

ARCHIBALD

Even better, it's Christmastime!

They ring little bells.

ARCHIBALD

When all the landed gentry ensconce themselves in their country estates to eat ham and *have sex*.

EUPHEMIA

So come with us now to Godfrey Hall and meet the lady of the house.

ARCHIBALD

Lydia Godfrey has lived nearly twenty-seven years in the world with very little to vex her.

EUPHEMIA

But believe us – girl’s about to get *vexed*.

ACT ONE.

SCENE ONE.

Godfrey Hall is an enormous, stately, gothic-looking home that walks a tight-rope between cozy and haunted.

MAGGIE, a maid, enters with ASHFORD, a handsome if somewhat overly serious man, following behind her.

There is a fire roaring, and above the mantelpiece is a portrait of the late Lord Godfrey dressed as Dionysus. ASHFORD is distracted by this.

MAGGIE

And here we are, sir. The drawing room. Do make yourself comfortable.

ASHFORD

Thank you.

MAGGIE

Did you know him?

ASHFORD

What?

MAGGIE

Everyone loves that portrait. Did you know the late marquess?

ASHFORD

Oh. No. I um – just arrived in Kent.

When will the marchioness be arriving?

MAGGIE

Oh, any time now.

LYDIA GODFREY enters from a different door, accompanied by A DASHING ROGUE, both disheveled and feeling good.

LYDIA

Maggie! You didn’t tell me we had a caller.

MAGGIE

Mr. Ashford to see you, ma’am. Your new neighbor.

ASHFORD reaches out to shake LYDIA's hand.

LYDIA dodges the gesture, goes to pour herself a cup of tea.

MAGGIE (*indicating the DASHING ROGUE*)
And who's this?

DASHING ROGUE
I'm Kenneth!

LYDIA
This is Kenneth! He's a dashing rogue I met last night.

DASHING ROGUE
And I'm a cheese seller!

LYDIA
And he sells cheese, what do you know!

MAGGIE
Shall I prepare a place at lunch for Kenneth the rogue cheesemonger?

DASHING ROGUE
Oh no, afraid I must be off.
(*to LYDIA*)
Had an excellent afternoon. Just capital.

LYDIA
So capital, yes.

They smooch.

DASHING ROGUE
I'll write to you.

LYDIA
Mm.

DASHING ROGUE exits.

LYDIA
He's not going to write. The cheese men never do.

LYDIA goes to ASHFORD and shakes his hand.

LYDIA

Lydia Godfrey. You've got a nice cravat.

ASHFORD

James Ashford. You have – hair.

LYDIA

A trait we have in common. I'm sure we'll be fast friends.

ASHFORD

Yes. Well. I'm afraid I haven't come just to be neighborly.

LYDIA

No? What is it you wish to be?

ASHFORD

Frank.

LYDIA

But I thought your name was James.

ASHFORD

No I wish to be frank with –

Honest. With you.

(To MAGGIE)

Is she always like this?

MAGGIE

Yes.

LYDIA

Yes.

ASHFORD

Very well, then let me be clear.

I've been informed you intend to begin a rather ambitious building project on the border of our lands, and I must ask that you reconsider.

LYDIA

Oh, you mean the folly!

ASHFORD

Is that what you call it?

LYDIA

It's going to be marvelous. Think: ancient Greek temple has sex with Edinburgh Castle.

ASHFORD

That sounds awful.

Short pause.

LYDIA

Maggie, will you leave us please?

MAGGIE

Alright, ma'am.

MAGGIE leaves.

ASHFORD

It is inappropriate for us to be alone, unchaperoned.

LYDIA

Why is that?

ASHFORD

You are a lady, you are unmarried.

LYDIA

I am marchioness.

In my own right.

A rare convergence of fate and dead men in which the rules are ever so slightly altered, and I think you'll find that I've made the most of what little wiggle room this affords me.

ASHFORD

Very well, then, to business –

LYDIA

Yes, I believe you were just insulting my taste.

ASHFORD

I spoke to a surveyor today who explained that this – *thing* – is going to be enormous. And I don't even understand what purpose it's meant to serve.

LYDIA

That *thing* is a folly. It doesn't serve a purpose.

ASHFORD

Well then – don't build it.

LYDIA

Convincing argument, but no can do.

ASHFORD
You mustn't build it.

LYDIA
I'm ever so curious why.

ASHFORD
Because it's –
I'll see it from my house.

LYDIA
How compelling.
Shall I cut down all the trees on my property that are visible from yours?
Slaughter all the deer?

ASHFORD
You mock me.

LYDIA
And you patronize me.

ASHFORD
How can I get you to stop it?

LYDIA
You could *ask* me.

Pause.

ASHFORD
Will you stop the construction?

LYDIA
No.
But you may stay for lunch.

Lights out.

SCENE TWO.

Enter ARCHIBALD and EUPHEMIA.

ARCHIBALD
Okay, I'm just going to say it, that was –

EUPHEMIA
HOT.

ARCHIBALD
I was going to say awkward.

EUPHEMIA
Awkward is just hot with glasses, darling.

ARCHIBALD
You're a freak, and that's why I love you.

EUPHEMIA
Speaking of little freaks, I believe Ashford and the marchioness are just finishing up their lunch...

The dining room.

Lunch is finished and cleared away.

LYDIA is sipping on some wine.

ASHFORD's full, untouched glass sits before him.

LYDIA
My father always wanted one, you see.

ASHFORD
A folly.

LYDIA
Yes.

ASHFORD
Why?

LYDIA
Lots of people have them.

ASHFORD
Forgive me – despite being neighbors, I believe you and I have moved in very different circles. A building that serves no purpose, that is purely decorative, and ostentatiously decorative at that – What is the point?

LYDIA
There is no point.

ASHFORD snorts.

LYDIA

Oh, there's something to be said for status, the ability to build a grand structure that one doesn't need just because one *can*, but my father...

Short pause.

LYDIA

I always remember him drawing.

I remember running into his study and seeing – books and books of illustrations, of buildings.

“Look at that plinth, Lydia!”

“Look at that vault!”

I started designing my own follies just to impress him, really.

But he always wanted to build one here, and he didn't get to. So.

I am building it.

ASHFORD

The folly – it's your design?

LYDIA

Yes.

ASHFORD considers her.

ASHFORD

And the building itself, once finished –

It will just sit there?

LYDIA

Yes. And you'll have a lovely view of it out your window.

ASHFORD

And if I don't want the view?

LYDIA

Pick a different window.

Short pause.

LYDIA

You don't like the wine?

ASHFORD

I don't drink.

LYDIA
Would you like something else?

ASHFORD
No –
Thank you.

LYDIA considers him.

LYDIA
What's your problem with it, anyway?

ASHFORD
The wine?

LYDIA
The folly.

ASHFORD
It's frivolous. And loud. And obstructive.

LYDIA
Hm. And you prefer things – quiet. Staid. Subservient.

ASHFORD
Buildings can't be subservient.

LYDIA
Are we talking about buildings?

ASHFORD
You are...

LYDIA
Yes?

MAGGIE runs into the room.

Seeing LYDIA and ASHFORD having a steamy moment, she yelps.

LYDIA
Maggie! What have I said about screaming when you enter a room?

MAGGIE
That I should save it for discovering a dead body, ma'am.

LYDIA

Precisely. What's the matter?

MAGGIE

Well ma'am, I just thought you should know, the weather forecast looks rather grim for tonight. I wonder if Mr. Richards will have a hard time getting up the drive.

LYDIA

It's blue skies outside!

MAGGIE

Yes, well, Cook says –

MAGGIE looks at ASHFORD shyly.

LYDIA

What is it, Maggie?

MAGGIE

Beg your pardon, only...Cook says her vagina is screaming like a harpooned whale, miss, and that means snow for certain!

LYDIA

Cook's vagina is always predicting some natural disaster or another. Besides, if it does snow I'm sure it'll clear out before Mr. Richards needs to attempt the drive.

MAGGIE

So we'll plan on dinner going ahead then?

LYDIA

Yes. Please let Cook know.

And maybe make her a hot water bottle or something.

MAGGIE

Yes, ma'am.

Short pause.

MAGGIE

Shall I set another place for dinner?

LYDIA remembers ASHFORD.

LYDIA

Oh. Well.

What do you say?
Fancy staying for dinner tonight?

ASHFORD
Depends. Who's Mr. Richards?

LYDIA
A cheesemonger.

ASHFORD blanches.

LYDIA
I'm joking.
He's a businessman. I'm pitching my designs to him.
You see, I'd quite like to go into business.

ASHFORD
Oh?

LYDIA
An architecture firm. I'd like him as a backer.

ASHFORD
Then I can't see why you'd want me here.

LYDIA
I know what it's like to be alone in a big house.

Pause.

ASHFORD
Alright I'll stay.

MAGGIE
Yay!

ASHFORD and LYDIA look at MAGGIE.

MAGGIE
I'm off.

Lights out.

SCENE THREE.

The main hall.

LYDIA welcomes RICHARDS, an earnest-looking man who shakes some snow off his coat.

MAGGIE takes the coat.

ASHFORD hovers nearby.

LYDIA

Come in, come in! This snow won't stick, don't worry –

MAGGIE (*ominous*)

Well, Cook says –

LYDIA

That we're having turducken tonight!

RICHARDS

Oh – I'm sure I don't deserve such a kind reception!

LYDIA

Don't be silly. I'm so thrilled you accepted my invitation.

RICHARDS

And who's this?

LYDIA

This is Ashford,
he's my neighbor –

ASHFORD

James Ashford, I'm
a solicitor –

LYDIA

He's my neighbor solicitor.
The solicitor next door who I don't know very well.

RICHARDS

Oh.

Great!

And what's uh –

In terms of –

You're also here!

LYDIA

I've invited Ashford to dinner, I hope you don't mind.

MAGGIE looks out the window.

RICHARDS

Oh! Of course not!

LYDIA

I promise he won't get in the way; he just looms mostly.
After dinner I'd like to show you what I've been working on.

RICHARDS

I'm so looking forward to it.

LYDIA

I trust the journey wasn't too grueling?

RICHARDS

Not at all. Nothing like a bumpy carriage ride to massage the hemorrhoids.

LYDIA

Sorry what?

MAGGIE

Miss, were we expecting more guests?

LYDIA

What – no, Maggie.

MAGGIE

There's someone else headed up the drive.

LYDIA

What?

MAGGIE

It's a man and woman.

LYDIA

Do they look like murderers?

MAGGIE

What does a murderer look like, ma'am?

LYDIA

Um. Axe-wielding, but not in a lumberjacky way.

MAGGIE

No, they've not got axes.

LYDIA

Well, we should let them in anyway, it's snowing.

LYDIA opens the door.

WINTERS, a loud individual with an even louder wardrobe, enters.

With him is LUCY, his wife.

They're both carrying suitcases.

WINTERS

Lydia, darling!

WINTERS puts his case down and goes to hug LYDIA.

WINTERS

The rest of our luggage is outside. It's quite heavy so I suggest assigning whichever servant has the least lumbago to bring it in.

LYDIA wiggles out of his embrace.

LYDIA

I'm sorry, who are you exactly?

WINTERS

Oh! I forgot. You and Lucy haven't met yet. Lydia – this is my new wife, Lucy Goosey, heir to the goose feather pillow fortune.

LUCY does an I'm-kind-of-a-big-deal curtsy.

LUCY

Well, it's Lucy Winters now.

LYDIA

Winters...

Wait. I've heard that name before.

Were you a friend of my father's?

WINTERS

Little Lydia, I'm surprised! You don't remember me?

LYDIA

I'm afraid not.

WINTERS

We used to spend Christmases together in London when you were just a baby, before your father abandoned us all for this backwater! But I must say, the place is much more impressive than I imagined. Of course, changes must be made, brighten the place up, modernize, you know.

LYDIA

Excuse me, what are you talking about?

WINTERS

Oh, Lydia darling, I should have sent a letter. How rude of me. Let me explain:

I'm your father's great-uncle's grandson!

Which makes me your second cousin once removed!

Which means I own this house!

LYDIA throws up in a vase.

Lights down.

SCENE FOUR.

Enter ARCHIBALD and EUPHEMIA.

ARCHIBALD

So you know that classic dinner party scenario where it's you, your grumpy neighbor, your potential business partner, and two strangers who want to *steal your house*?

EUPHEMIA

It's the kind of stinky social stew that Jane Austen would have brought to a holiday potluck.

ARCHIBALD

Let's see how Lydia's handling things in the drawing room, shall we?

They start to leave.

EUPHEMIA

Oh, and there's a blizzard!

It starts to snow.

The drawing room.

LYDIA sits on a chaise lounge.

WINTERS sits at a table nearby, laying out papers.

RICHARDS and LUCY are playing cards.

ASHFORD is hovering by the fireplace, reading a book while trying to watch LYDIA without being weird about it.

MAGGIE enters, bringing LYDIA a cup of tea.

MAGGIE

Are you sure you're alright, miss?

LYDIA

Yes, Maggie.

MAGGIE

Not going to upchuck vom your lunch again, miss?

LYDIA

Yes Maggie thank you.

LYDIA stands up.

WINTERS

Oh, Lyddie, don't overexert yourself.

LYDIA

First of all. Do not presume to call me *Lyddie*, I don't know you.

Second of all, you cannot barge into my home uninvited and declare it yours.

That's not how homeownership works.

WINTERS

Oh, but my dear, it's England, eighteen-*(mumble)*, so I'm afraid that actually *is* how homeownership works in a startlingly large number of cases!

LYDIA

This is Godfrey Hall. I am Lydia Godfrey. I am marchioness in my own right now my father is gone.

WINTERS

Oh! Yes, I did forget to say: my condolences.

But I think you'll find that I am your father's heir.

LYDIA

No, that can't be.

WINTERS

Take a look here.

WINTERS indicates the paper spread out in front of him.

LYDIA looks.

It's old family papers, wills, documents, old-timey genealogical stuff.

WINTERS

You see?

Your grandfather had a cousin, and that cousin's second wife gave birth to me!
Which makes me your father's nearest male relative, and the rightful heir to his title.

LYDIA

That doesn't even make sense.

WINTERS

Exactly.

LYDIA

What?

WINTERS

What?

LYDIA

I think you've gotten quite ahead of yourself.
I can't possibly verify all of this myself.
My solicitor will have to look at it.

WINTERS

Your solicitor.

LYDIA

Yes! And what luck that he's here tonight.
Mr. Ashford –

ASHFORD drops his book.

WINTERS

Him?

ASHFORD

Me?

LYDIA

Yes. He is my new neighbor and – as it happens – new solicitor.
Right?

She looks at him. She is asking for help.

Pause.

ASHFORD

Yes. I am – I *am* her solicitor!

ASHFORD tries bravado.

ASHFORD

I shall have to make inquiries into the validity of these papers – how do we know you are who you say you are, Mr. Winters?

LUCY

Oh, he is. I had him thoroughly investigated by a private detective before I agreed to marry him.

WINTERS

You did?

LUCY

Why of course, dear. My grandfather *invented* goose feathers! You have no idea how many scam artists tried to get into my goose feathers over the years.

Short pause.

LUCY

And my pants.

ASHFORD

Alright –

LUCY

On the subject, though – how do we know *you* are legitimate, sir? I've never heard of you.

ASHFORD

I'm James Ashford, I bought the house next door.

LUCY

An upstart.

WINTERS

A vagabond solicitor thinks he can question me in my ancestral home!

ASHFORD

It's *her* home, you puffed-up –

LYDIA

Both of you! Please!

Short pause.

LYDIA

Mr. Richards, I'm so sorry for all this bickering.

RICHARDS

I'm afraid I quite dislike conflict.

My parents used to argue so much that they didn't notice I moved to France for a year.

LYDIA

Oh! How – personal.

RICHARDS

Perhaps I should leave –

LYDIA

No! Please. Please stay. At least for dinner.

It's practically a blizzard outside!

EVERYONE looks out the window.

It's practically a blizzard outside.

MAGGIE

Cook's vagina was right...

LYDIA

We'll all enjoy a nice meal together. Please allow me to entertain you. As my guests.

WINTERS

I think you'll find that I'm actually my own guest.

LYDIA

Not. Yet.

Lights out.

SCENE FIVE.

The dining room.

ASHFORD is alone.

LYDIA enters.

LYDIA

Dinner's not for a few more minutes.

ASHFORD

Yes.

I was just –

Taking a moment.

LYDIA

I quite understand. The company tonight has become –

ASHFORD

Yes.

LYDIA

Yes.

Pause.

LYDIA

Thank you. For backing me up.

I know I put you quite on the spot.

ASHFORD

Think nothing of it.

LYDIA

Oh but I do think something of it.

I think you lied to me earlier.

ASHFORD

Oh?

LYDIA

I am beginning to suspect that you *do* mean to be neighborly.

She smiles.

He's annoyed.

ASHFORD

I think you'll find my reasons for helping you were not entirely unselfish.

LYDIA

No?

ASHFORD

I've met men like Winters before. Blowhards and peacocks.
I will help you with him, and in exchange –

LYDIA is holding back a laugh.

ASHFORD

In exchange –

LYDIA covers her mouth, still laughing.

ASHFORD

What. What is funny.

LYDIA (delighted)

Blowhard / Peacock.

ASHFORD

Blowhard Peacock yes yes hilarious yes.

LYDIA

Sorry go ahead go ahead.

ASHFORD

I was just –

ASHFORD breaks. He laughs.

LYDIA

Ah-ha!

ASHFORD

I was just saying.

I'll help you. And in exchange, you'll put an end to this folly business.

LYDIA sobers.

LYDIA

I can't do that.

I won't do that.

ASHFORD

Build it anywhere else –

Offer to build it on Richards' land for the love of –

LYDIA

My father wanted the folly to be built here and that is where I will build it.

Pause.

LYDIA

You don't understand. When he died...

You don't understand.

ASHFORD

Try me.

A bell rings.

LYDIA

Time for dinner.

Lights out.

SCENE SIX.

The party is in the middle of a formal dinner.

LUCY

And then she said, "That's not a grouse, that's my husband!"

The table politely laughs. WINTERS absolutely fucking loses it.

WINTERS

Oh my love, your storytelling abilities are unmatched. You're like Homer with a voluptuous bosom. Shakespeare with powerful thighs.

LUCY

Oh darling, I want you to stuff me like this turducken.

ASHFORD chokes on turducken.

LUCY

I say, Mr. Ashford! Are you alright?

ASHFORD

Yes, of course.

LYDIA

I'm afraid Ashford here has the misfortune of being allergic to joy.

RICHARDS

Oh how dreadful.

LUCY

Yes, I have trouble with gluten, so I quite understand.

ASHFORD

On the contrary. I find joy and fulfillment in many parts of my life.

LYDIA

Yes, sir, that's exactly what happy people sound like.

ASHFORD

Happiness is found in meaningful work. Not in empty buildings.
Wouldn't you agree, Lady Godfrey?

WINTERS

Why of course! One can't be truly happy without furniture!

LYDIA

I would agree, sir, if I didn't think you lack a basic understanding of whimsy.

ASHFORD

I don't often deal in whimsy.

RICHARDS

Well he is a solicitor.

LYDIA

You should try it sometime. Fun for fun's sake. Perhaps where you see an empty building, I am able to fill it with meaning of my own.

ASHFORD

Perhaps I do not have that luxury.

LYDIA

To enjoy yourself? Maybe try smiling once in a fortnight?

ASHFORD

Everything I have has been hard won. Everything I've built I've built on my own. You are a marchioness, a rare convergence of fate and dead men that allows you to live a life where buildings don't need any purpose other than to amuse you, but I assure you this is not the world the rest of us live in.

Pause.

EVERYONE is uncomfy.

LYDIA

It's not for you to say that my work isn't meaningful.

ASHFORD

I don't wish to stare at that monstrosity / every day of my life –

LYDIA

No, no, there's something more –
What is your problem with my folly?

RICHARDS

Lady Godfrey. Lydia –
May I call you Lydia?

LYDIA

Oh –
Yes. That's fine.

RICHARDS

This turducken has been truly – labyrinthine in its execution.
But I'm just so excited to see what you have prepared for me.
Forgive me. I'm just too eager – may we adjourn?

LYDIA

Yes. Yes, of course, Mr. Richards –

RICHARDS

Oh please. Mr. was my father.
Call me Richards.

LYDIA

Sure. Why don't we all go to the drawing room?
I've put together something I hope you'll agree is very thrilling.

She stands.

LYDIA

And just as a warning, Ashford, it's going to be fun, so do take whatever medication you require beforehand.

SCENE SEVEN.

The party examines the portrait of Lord Godfrey.

LYDIA

Yes, if you look in the background, you can see the maenads tearing Pentheus' innards out.

LUCY

Oh, yes, quite.

LYDIA

Father loved Dionysus. Not in a religious way – all good Protestants here!

EVERYONE kind of nods and murmurs like “yes us too of course.”

LYDIA

But *The Bacchae* was his favorite play.

LUCY

What a coincidence! *The Bacchae* was one of the first plays I produced in London.

LYDIA

Produced?

LUCY

Yes, I'm a –

WINTERS

My lovely wife insists on keeping her theatre hobby even though she has no need for the money!
We must allow women their follies, mustn't we.

WINTERS elbows ASHFORD, who doesn't know how to respond to this.

LYDIA

Well. Speaking of.

Everyone please take a seat!

They all sit.

LYDIA gestures for MAGGIE to join her in the center of the room.

The two of them stand side by side, facing away from the crowd.

Then, with a breath, they turn around.

LYDIA & MAGGIE

Hi, Mr. Richards!

LYDIA

I'm Lady Lydia Godfrey, marchioness and architect, and I'm seeking three thousand pounds for ten percent of my company: Godfrey's Follies. Has this ever happened to you?

MAGGIE

Ooh! Ooh I'm a very wealthy, very fancy and rich *old man*, and I love my enormous house and the sprawling lands that surround it but oh! Oh I wish there was also just a Greek *ruin* just – somewhere about!

LYDIA

Landowners all over England are saying –

MAGGIE

I wish I lived on an ancient burial site!

LYDIA

And convenience is key –

MAGGIE

But I really don't want to reckon with death!

LYDIA

That's where Godfrey's Follies come in.

LYDIA nods to MAGGIE.

MAGGIE takes out large blueprints and designs that LYDIA has drawn and begins showing them around the room.

LYDIA

I take the idea of your dreams – a medieval stronghold, a Roman temple, a Viking settlement – and turn it into reality. And I should know the customer base because I'm part of it! We are about to break ground on our very first folly – right here on this land!

MAGGIE

All the colonnades of paganism without the damnation!
And it'll also like a little like Edinburgh Castle because that place is good too!

LYDIA

So what do you say, Richards?
Are you ready to –

LYDIA and MAGGIE cross their arms and lean against each other's backs.

LYDIA & MAGGIE

Get Godfrey'd?

Pause.

LYDIA

Now would be a good clapping moment.

Polite clapping.

RICHARDS stands.

RICHARDS

Really, Lady Godfrey! How creative you are!

LYDIA

Would you like to see the blueprints up close?

LYDIA rushes to grab her notes.

LUCY

I say – Maggie, is it?

MAGGIE

Yes, ma'am.

LUCY

You've got great stage presence.

MAGGIE

Oh, thank you, ma'am! I was once the key witness in a fraud case, so I had to do quite a bit of testifying. Guess that's where I get my love of the stage!

LUCY

That sentence started normal and ended crazy – brava!

MAGGIE curtseys and exits.

LYDIA hands a stack of blueprints and sketches to RICHARDS.

LYDIA

So you can see, these are my preliminary designs.

RICHARDS

I say! You drew these all yourself?

LYDIA

Yes, of course.

RICHARDS gives the drawings a cursory glance and then sets them aside.

RICHARDS
Just wonderful.

LYDIA
Are you sure you don't want to go over the details? Or discuss my valuation?

ASHFORD picks up the blueprints, examines them.

RICHARDS
I'm really just touched that you went to all this effort for me.

LYDIA
Oh, well. Of course I did. I imagine any potential partner would want to see an example of my work.

RICHARDS laughs.

LYDIA just goes with it and laughs too. She kind of looks at MAGGIE like "weird, right?"

RICHARDS
Lady Godfrey, you are exactly as they said you'd be.
I must admit, I'm charmed.

LYDIA
Exactly how – who? Said I'd be?

RICHARDS
Oh you know – people talk. And of course your reputation precedes you.

LYDIA
Oh.

RICHARDS
But of course I didn't listen to all that. Especially that nonsense about the cheesemongers.

LYDIA
Oh, that's all true.

RICHARDS
Sorry?

LYDIA

I mean, not exactly. It's not *only* cheesemongers you see. I've only been with two cheesemongers, but I suppose it's weird that it happened twice, so people latch onto that.

LUCY

Lady Godfrey, you are scandalous!

LYDIA

I'm really not. I know plenty of gentlemen with similar stories to mine.

WINTERS

What would your father think.

LYDIA

Richards – what do you think of my designs?

ASHFORD

They're extraordinary.

Pause. LYDIA is surprised.

ASHFORD is frankly also surprised.

ASHFORD

I mean – they're entirely too ostentatious for my taste. Half of these columns aren't even holding anything up.

LYDIA

Well. Thank you. For the first bit of what you said.
But – Richards?

RICHARDS

Lady Godfrey –

MAGGIE enters.

MAGGIE

Excuse me, miss –
There's a group of carolers outside.

LYDIA

Carolers? In this weather?

MAGGIE

Afraid so, miss.

LYDIA

Well, we must let them inside at least.
Come, everyone. Follow Maggie to the hall, I'll be right there.

WINTERS and RICHARDS follow MAGGIE out.

ASHFORD hands LYDIA her blueprints back. He hesitates, then exits after the others.

LUCY lingers.

LUCY

I have to say, Lady Godfrey, I was hesitant to follow my husband on this excursion.
I'm in no need of another house. We Gooseys have quite the real estate portfolio.

LYDIA

It's not just the house. Your husband wants my title as well.

LUCY

And why do you think that is?

Short pause.

LUCY

It's my fault, really. He married me because I'm successful and important, and now can't stand that he isn't more successful and important than me. But here's the trick: if he were, then he wouldn't think me good enough for him anymore. It's an ouroboros of stupidity, I'm afraid. And all the worse for me, because I really do love him.

LYDIA

That seems – unreasonable.

LUCY

People often are.
But anyway, I'm glad I met you.
Although I do wonder at some of the company you keep.

LYDIA

Oh – I know Ashford is a grump. But he's my neighbor, you know, and –

LUCY

I wasn't talking about Ashford.

Short pause.

LYDIA

Shall we go hear the carolers?

LUCY
After you.

Lights out.

SCENE EIGHT.

The main hall.

LYDIA welcomes TWO CAROLERS into the house. They are wearing so many layers.

EVERYONE ELSE looks on.

FIRST CAROLER
There were eight of us, but the others turned back on account of this historically bad blizzard!

SECOND CAROLER
But we said no, we're going to Godfrey Hall to sing for the lady, 'cause it's Christmastime and she must be lonely up there now she's lost her father!

LYDIA
Thank you for coming. Truly. But you shouldn't have gone to all the trouble –

SECOND CAROLER
Understand this, my lady: Christmas caroling is my passion. I would kill or be killed in its pursuit.

LYDIA
That is – admirable.

FIRST CAROLER
May we do our song, ma'am?

LYDIA
Of course, but – will it work with only two of you?

FIRST CAROLER
Of course it will. You'll just have to imagine the other six parts.

SECOND CAROLER (*to RICHARDS*)
I say – do I know you?

RICHARDS
Can't imagine you do, no.

SECOND CAROLER

I say, you look familiar – doesn't he look familiar, Jimmy?

FIRST CAROLER

He does! He does look familiar!

MAGGIE

We'll have the song now if you don't mind!

FIRST CAROLER

Oh, yes, of course.

LYDIA

Wonderful.

Well then. Please –

She gestures for them to begin.

She goes and stands beside ASHFORD with the others.

The CAROLERS begin performing two parts of what should be an eight-part harmony arrangement of Auld Lang Syne. I cannot emphasize this enough: this sounds bad and cursed.

LYDIA is trying to look encouraging but this is a true train wreck.

THE CAROLERS begin to look somewhat dejected, like they might just give up.

But then ASHFORD comes in with the melody!

LYDIA looks at him, shocked. She joins in as well. Then MAGGIE. Then, slowly, everyone else.

They sign Auld Lang Syne. It's pretty nice. When was Auld Lang Syne written? I don't know and it's the vibes that matter here anyway.

The song ends, and EVERYONE claps for the CAROLERS.

LYDIA

Truly wonderful. Thank you. Can I interest you in some soup? You must be freezing.

SECOND CAROLER

As long as it's not a creamy broth, ma'am. Gotta protect the vocal cords.

LYDIA

Of course. Maggie?

MAGGIE

Let me show you the dining room.

MAGGIE exits with the CAROLERS.

LYDIA addresses the group.

LYDIA

You should all feel welcome to stay the night.
The storm is worse than I thought.

WINTERS

Thank you – I'll take the largest bedroom.

LYDIA

Alright but be warned – it's very haunted.

WINTERS

I'll take the second largest bedroom.

Lights out.

SCENE NINE.

The drawing room.

ASHFORD is alone, looking out the window.

LYDIA enters.

LYDIA

Everyone's having soup. Don't you want some?

ASHFORD

I'm sorry.

LYDIA

Oh. Thanks.

For what?

ASHFORD

I'm sorry about your father. You must miss him.

Pause.

LYDIA
Oh.

ASHFORD
Forgive me, I don't mean to pry, I just –

LYDIA
No, no, it's fine, I –
He was –
He loved Christmas.

Pause.

LYDIA
Sometimes I wonder what the point is.
Preparing for the holidays if he won't be here.

ASHFORD
I understand.

Short pause.

LYDIA
You do?

ASHFORD
I come from a small family. It was just my parents and myself.
My mother was sick and my father – was sick.
They've both been gone for a while.

LYDIA
I'm sorry.

Short pause.

LYDIA
Does it get easier?

ASHFORD
I don't know.
Maybe sometimes.
And sometimes...

LYDIA
Right.

Pause.

ASHFORD

The folly – it's for him.

LYDIA nods.

LYDIA

It's – for us.

He's the reason I started down this path and now –
I truly love it.

ASHFORD

Yes.

Pause.

ASHFORD

Can I ask you to trust me?

LYDIA

I mean, it depends on what you say next, but sure.

ASHFORD

I'd like to show you something. But it would require us going outside.

LYDIA

In the snow?

ASHFORD

Yes.

Pause.

LYDIA

I'll get my hat.

Lights out.

SCENE TEN.

Late night. A field.

LYDIA and ASHFORD, bundled up, trudge through the snow.

LYDIA

I like to credit myself with being a smart, worldly person, so if you end up murdering me, egg on my face, honestly.

ASHFORD

I'm not going to murder you.

LYDIA

No offense, but I'm pretty sure the number of murderers who have said *that exact thing* –

ASHFORD

Lydia –

LYDIA

Astronomical.

They laugh.

Pause.

LYDIA

Lydia, huh?

ASHFORD

Forgive me. I shouldn't have presumed –

LYDIA

No, no. It's –

You can presume.

ASHFORD

Alright. Lydia.

LYDIA

James.

Short pause.

LYDIA

Where are we going?

ASHFORD stops. LYDIA pauses beside him.

He's looking for something on the ground.

LYDIA

What? What is it?

ASHFORD

When I was a child, my mother would take me on walks like this.
We walked a lot. When I was young. We didn't always want to be at home.
And anyway she loved being in nature, she loved –

Pause.

ASHFORD

When she passed I went to London, got my education, got to where I am now.
All so I could find a home out here. Somewhere she would have loved. Somewhere I could see...
There.

He points.

LYDIA looks. It's fresh deer tracks.

LYDIA

Deer tracks?

ASHFORD

Shh.

LYDIA

It's Kent. We have deer.

ASHFORD

Yes, but if we're quiet –

They're quiet for a long moment.

Then, out of the snowfall, they see two deer.

ASHFORD and LYDIA watch.

At first the deer do not notice the two of them. Then, finally, they do.

ASHFORD and LYDIA are still as statues. They don't breathe.

The deer approach. A moment passes. And then, they move away.

ASHFORD

This is their home. If you build that folly...

LYDIA

I see.

They look at each other.

LYDIA

I forgot to breathe.

They both release a breath of laughter.

Silence. Then,

LYDIA

If I build it, you'll be disappointed.

ASHFORD

...Yes.

LYDIA

Then before I lose your good opinion –

They kiss.

Lights out.

End of ACT ONE.

ACT TWO.

PROLOGUE.

Enter ARCHIBALD and EUPHEMIA.

ARCHIBALD

I hope you all had a restful intermission –

EUPHEMIA

Yeah, I hope you all took a nice long pee and drank your little drink –

ARCHIBALD

Meanwhile we've been waiting in *suspense!*

EUPHEMIA

Will Richards go into business with Lydia? Will she build the folly? Will she and Ashford / fuu –

ARCHIBALD

Find love.

EUPHEMIA

And what's going to happen to the local deer population! I mean, that's a concern!

ARCHIBALD

Well. Get snug folks. 'Cause we're back.

SCENE ONE.

LYDIA and ASHFORD warm themselves by the fire.

ASHFORD

You're still going to build it, aren't you?

LYDIA

I –

Short pause.

LYDIA

I have to. If I don't build it – all my work –
I'm an architect. I have to – architecture.

ASHFORD

I – yes. I understand.

LYDIA

I can see that you're trying to. And that means –
I appreciate that.

Pause.

ASHFORD

Lydia, I would like to be –
A good neighbor to you.

LYDIA

Oh.

ASHFORD

I mean I want to be –
I want –

LYDIA

Yes?

ASHFORD

I want – what you want.

Short pause.

LYDIA

I want...

RICHARDS enters.

LYDIA

Richards!

ASHFORD

Oh.

LYDIA

No! Not!

I mean. Richards. You're here.

RICHARDS

The snow seems to be clearing up. Should be able to make the drive soon.

LYDIA

No you mustn't leave! Not before you say what you think of my designs.

RICHARDS

Oh the sketches?

LYDIA

The blueprints.

WINTERS and LUCY enter.

WINTERS

Well Lydia, I'm sorry to report that your second largest bedroom is *also* haunted. Ghosts are no good in a big house like this. Drives down the market value.

LUCY takes note of LYDIA and ASHFORD.

LUCY

Lydia darling, have you been outside?

LYDIA

I –

You're leaving?

WINTERS

Well yes, I've got to meet with my own solicitor as soon as possible, since you "insist" on me "proving" that I have the "legal right" to "take your property from you."

LYDIA

Yes. How inconvenient for you.

WINTERS

It really is.

RICHARDS

I'd be happy to share a coach with you, Winters.
And Lydia, you may join me in London soon if you'd like.

LYDIA

So you have thought of my proposal!
Please – what do you think?

RICHARDS goes to her.

RICHARDS

Lady Godfrey, you dear girl –
You've made such a sweet effort, presenting all this. But you do not need to prove your worth to me. There is no need for all these figures and diagrams – your beauty is enough.

LYDIA

Sorry, what?

RICHARDS

The beauty of your heart, I mean! Alongside the beauty of your face and body.

LUCY

Here we go.

RICHARDS (*jovial*)

But we can cast away all this pretense now – you are no architect, my dear.
And your father was no Dionysus.

He pauses for laughter.

RICHARDS

You are the product of a fine family, if an unlucky one. Indeed, all those who should have lived to teach and guide you are now gone – so you can of course be forgiven your follies.

Indeed, to wed a woman of such a reputation as yours may be seen as foolish. To some it may be seen as settling. But I feel quite moved, Lady Godfrey, to kindness in this matter. I offer you my forgiving heart and my guiding hand. In marriage, obviously.

LYDIA
...Obviously.

Pause.

LYDIA
And that's why you accepted my invitation? Not to discuss business?

RICHARDS
Darling, I assumed that was a euphemism.

LYDIA
...Oh.

RICHARDS
So? What do you say?

LYDIA
I...

ASHFORD
I'm sorry – to what reputation are you referring?

RICHARDS
Oh! Ashford – proposals aren't really an audience participation kind of thing.

ASHFORD
You said you will forgive Lady Godfrey's reputation. What reputation is that? What forgiveness does she require.

RICHARDS
Why, it's hardly proper to go into –

ASHFORD
Has Lady Godfrey killed someone? Stolen? Defrauded?
No. Her reputation in the village is one of generosity, of patronage, of earnest – if a little eccentric – care for her neighbors. These things matter. And anything else to which you might be referring, sir, is none of your business, nor anyone else's.

Pause.

LYDIA

We need wine.

Yes? A nice – port, or –

ASHFORD

Lady Godfrey –

RICHARDS

Should I take that as a yes –

LYDIA

No!

I need – I just –

I'm going to find some wine –

RICHARDS

Surely one of the staff can –

LYDIA

I am going to find some wine.

LYDIA exits.

RICHARDS

Why. The girl is overwhelmed. I should go after her –

ASHFORD

You should not.

RICHARDS

Oh-ho. You've quite played your hand now, Ashford.

I see. Want her for yourself, do you?

LUCY

Richards, shut the fuck up.

WINTERS

Lucy!

LUCY

No. He's not stupid. He didn't *misunderstand* Lady Godfrey's intentions, *oh dear, oh silly me, I'm just a nice young gentleman* – you came into this house intending to make her feel small enough to settle for you.

RICHARDS

Winters, your wife is –

LUCY
Talking to you, so you look at me.

Pause.

LUCY
Difficult, isn't it?
Now you know I see you.

Pause. Then, LUCY notices ASHFORD.

LUCY
You're still here? Go after her!

ASHFORD rushes out of the room.

LUCY
Idiots!

Lights out.

SCENE TWO.

The wine cellar.

LYDIA is sitting on the floor, drinking straight from a dusty bottle of red.

ASHFORD enters, sees her.

LYDIA
I thought you wouldn't come here.
Because you don't drink.

ASHFORD
That's not really how it works.
I'm sober, not a vampire.

Short pause.

ASHFORD
May I sit?

She nods.

ASHFORD sits beside her.

LYDIA

You know, I think this is the first time I've been embarrassed in front of you.

ASHFORD

Lydia –

LYDIA

He thought I should want to marry him.

And why wouldn't he?

A single woman living all alone in this big house.

That must be what I want, right? I must be so lonely. I must be so sad.

Pause.

LYDIA

And I'm so angry, I'm so *angry* because –

Fuck. Because I am lonely, I am –

I'm so lonely.

Pause.

LYDIA

I miss him so much.

ASHFORD

I know.

LYDIA

But that doesn't mean.

ANDREWS

No. It doesn't mean.

Pause.

LYDIA

My father did me the great disservice of treating me like a full person.

I'm afraid I've been left rather ill-prepared in life.

ASHFORD

Lydia –

LYDIA

I want so badly to be able to – hold all of it.

If I don't marry, I'm a failure. If I do marry, it's because I finally gave in and admitted I should.

Either way, I lose. If I call myself an architect, it's just a folly of mine until a man agrees. If I live my life the way I choose, it's shameful until a man loves me anyway. Until he agrees that I am what I call myself. It doesn't matter how much I isolate myself, how much I tell myself I don't care – I put a period on my choices where men see a question mark. I'm alone, is that okay? I'm happy, is that okay?

It feels like I got my dress stuck in a thornbush, and the only way to get free is to rip it off. But I couldn't possibly do that, could I? It wouldn't be proper.

Short pause.

ASHFORD
No, it wouldn't be.

Short pause.

ASHFORD
But, you know. At this point, fuck it.

LYDIA is surprised.

After a moment, she laughs.

The giggles catch.

They dissolve into a laughing fit.

LYDIA
Thank you.
For that. And for – before.

ASHFORD
Of course.
Of course.

Pause.

Come on you two, you can do it!

...

ASHFORD
Oh – there's a spider in your hair –

LYDIA
Fuck – get it!

ASHFORD

Ah –

A lot of swatting and wiggling.

Pause.

LYDIA

We should go back upstairs.

This cellar is gross.

And almost certainly haunted.

ASHFORD

Yes.

Pause.

LYDIA

I don't know what to do.

ASHFORD

Lydia, this is your house.

You do whatever it is you want.

Lights out.

SCENE THREE.

The drawing room.

RICHARDS, WINNTERS, and LUCY are sitting.

ASHFORD and LYDIA enter.

RICHARDS

There you are, my dear! Now. What say you to my proposal.

LYDIA

Yes, sorry to keep you waiting.

RICHARDS joins LYDIA in the center of the room.

LYDIA

Your proposal. I was just thinking –

You haven't kneeled.

Short pause.

RICHARDS

Sorry?

LYDIA

You didn't kneel down. So it wasn't really a proper proposal, was it?

RICHARDS

I didn't think you stood on ceremony.

LYDIA

Call it a folly of mine.

Kneel down, please.

Pause.

Then, RICHARDS kneels.

RICHARDS

Lydia Godfrey.

LYDIA

Lady.

RICHARDS

Lady Lydia Godfrey.

Will you marry me?

LYDIA looks over RICHARDS head at ASHFORD.

LYDIA

I am a difficult person to love. I don't say this out of self-effacement, I say it because it's true: I make it difficult. I lost the person I loved the most and when you touch pain as sharp as that, you do well to avoid it in the future. You tuck yourself away, you build a fortress around your grief: one that doesn't serve any purpose except to distract those around you from how scared you really are. And I am scared. All the time.

She looks back at RICHARDS.

LYDIA

You said you would forgive me my faults. You see my lifestyle as promiscuous and my ambitions as delusional. If accept your proposal, I am agreeing that you're right. If I accept your proposal, I am apologizing.

She looks at the portrait of her father.

LYDIA

And I was raised never to apologize for who I am.

Pause.

RICHARDS

So...you're saying...

LYDIA

Oh, was I not clear?

LYDIA helps RICHARDS up.

LYDIA

Absolutely fucking not.

WINTERS

Lyddie, dear! You won't get a better proposal than this!

LYDIA

I don't even *know you*, stop calling me Lyddie!

WINTERS

We are *family*. And since your father isn't here, I see I must step into the role.

Richards is a good man – he's quite fumbled tonight, but his heart is pure! He wants to take care of you!

RICHARDS

I have the means to fund your passion projects, Lady Godfrey. With me, you can build your architecture firm.

LYDIA

Not worth it, sorry.

And you –

She points at WINTERS.

LYDIA

You are very lucky that your smart, hot wife has terrible taste in men. Stop trying to get yourself a title to impress her and just be a good partner! My goodness!

WINTERS

How dare you comment on my personal life like that, you don't know me.

LYDIA

I thought we were family.

WINTERS

Yes, well, the gig is up now, isn't it?

WINTERS and RICHARDS both pull out pistols.

LUCY

What the fuck!

ASHFORD goes to LYDIA.

LUCY ducks behind the chaise lounge.

RICHARDS

No sudden moves, Ashford, or things are going to get messy.

LYDIA

What are you doing!

RICHARDS

This was supposed to be an easy scam. You were supposed to be some affection-starved eccentric in a nightgown, ready to toss herself on the first respectable man who looked her way.

WINTERS

Desperate for a father figure to take the burden of your inheritance off your hands.

LYDIA

You're not actually my second cousin thrice removed or whatever the fuck, are you?

WINTERS

Nope.

LYDIA

And you're not a wealthy London businessman?

RICHARDS

Well, I'm about to be.

ASHFORD

Just put the pistols down – are you mad?

RICHARDS

Yeah, mad about money!

LYDIA

You orchestrated this whole thing.

WINTERS

It's been a long con, I'll tell you that much. When we heard the old marquess died and his unmarried daughter got everything, we came up with these new identities. I became Winters, even got myself a wife to seem proper. Sorry, darling.

LUCY (*still behind the couch*)

Fuck you!

WINTERS

Had to be your decision though, to sign it all over, so we let you think it was your idea: inviting Richards over, letting me stay the night –

LYDIA

But you couldn't have anticipated the blizzard.

WINTERS

Or could we?!

Short pause.

WINTERS

We couldn't obviously but it worked out great.

RICHARDS

You were supposed to marry me, then I'd take the house and let Winters here have the title.

LYDIA

Is Winters even your real name?

WINTERS

No, my real name is Robert Crime.

RICHARDS

And mine is Chris Demeanor.

ASHFORD steps in front of LYDIA.

ASHFORD

You won't get away with this.

RICHARDS

Oh yes we will. Because if you don't agree to give us everything, Lydia, we're going to kill your neighbor here.

WINTERS

Oh, but he's not just a neighbor, is he? No, he's also your *solicitor*.

RICHARDS

And *that's* a euphemism.

WINTERS

Agree to our terms or he dies.

LYDIA

Fine.

ASHFORD

Lydia, don't!

LYDIA

I'm not going to let them shoot you!

ASHFORD

I'm not going to let them extort you!

LYDIA

Being extorted is better than being murdered!

ASHFORD

What do you think they're gonna do to you after they extort you!

LYDIA

Oh, shit.

LUCY

Maggie, now!

MAGGIE kicks the door in.

At the same moment, LUCY pops up from behind the chaise lounge.

They both have pistols.

They point them at WINTERS and RICHARDS.

MAGGIE

Not so fast!

LYDIA and ASHFORD hit the deck.

LYDIA

Oh what the fuck why does everyone have guns!

WINTERS

Lucy darling, what is the meaning of this?

LUCY

I wasn't lying about having you investigated before our wedding, dear.

And the detective I hired?

It was Maggie here.

MAGGIE

My full name is Magistrate Justice.

WINTERS

Maggie is short for *Magistrate*?

MAGGIE

That's Detective Magistrate to you.

LYDIA

What is going on.

MAGGIE

Sorry for the deception, ma'am, but sometimes a long con is in order.

LUCY

She discovered Crime's web of lies and crime and informed me. And then we decided to get real messy about it.

MAGGIE (*to RICHARDS*)

And as for you. I recognized you from the fraud case I worked all those years ago. So did the carolers.

RICHARDS

Damn my unforgettably handsome face.

MAGGIE

You're both under arrest. To the kitchen. Now.

LUCY

You heard her. Go.

MAGGIE and LUCY usher RICHARDS and WINTERS out of the room.

They all exit, leaving ASHFORD and LYDIA alone on the floor.

They look at each other.

Pause.

LYDIA

What.

Lights out.

SCENE FOUR.

The main hall. LUCY and MAGGIE have just shut the front door.

ASHFORD and LYDIA look on, stunned.

MAGGIE

Nothing I love better than a good Christmastime sting.

LUCY

Couldn't agree more.

LYDIA

I just can't wrap my head around it. You were an undercover detective this whole time?

MAGGIE

I hope you won't hold it against me. I really did enjoy getting to know you, and I hope we might continue to be friends?

LYDIA

I – yes, of course!

LYDIA and MAGGIE hug.

LYDIA

What will you do now?

MAGGIE

I'll go back to London, keep working cases.
There's always another Crime that needs to meet Justice.

ASHFORD

So cool.

MAGGIE

And I was thinking...

She looks at LUCY.

MAGGIE
I could use a partner.

LUCY
Me?

MAGGIE
If you have time, of course. Outside your responsibilities as a producer, and being the heiress of...every goose feather in England? That part honestly confused me.

LUCY
I would love to, Maggie. Truly.

MAGGIE
Then that's settled.
And I'm glad.

MAGGIE and LUCY look to ASHFORD and LYDIA, then at each other.

LUCY
I suppose we'll take our leave then.

LYDIA
Don't feel rushed!

MAGGIE
Oh no! It's fine.

LUCY
Besides – I think the two of you might have some discussing to do.

MAGGIE and LUCY exit.

Pause.

ASHFORD
I don't know if this was the worst day of my life or just the one with the most plot twists.

LYDIA
Quite.

Pause.

LYDIA

It's late. You could, um. Stay the night.

ASHFORD

The snow isn't so bad now, I can –

LYDIA

Yes if you'd be more comfortable at home, of course. Yes.

Short pause.

ASHFORD

But I'll stay here. If it's not imposing too much.

LYDIA

Alright.

ASHFORD

Alright.

Pause. Are they going to kiss? It looks like they might, and then...

ARCHIBALD and EUPHEMIA enter and shoo LYDIA and ASHFORD away!

ARCHIBALD

Wow, what a play!

EUPHEMIA

What an ending!

ARCHIBALD

There were guns!

EUPHEMIA

And a guy named Robert Crime!

ARCHIBALD

And mistaken identities!

EUPHEMIA

And there was that singing bit in the first act!

ARCHIBALD

Anyway, I do love a happy ending, don't you?

EUPHEMIA

Yep. Nothing left to wrap up, just good vibes.

ARCHIBALD

Make sure you collect all your personal belongings on your way out of the theatre.

EUPHEMIA

Get home safely

ARCHIBALD

And as for us?

EUPHEMIA

Well, we're looking for a third. See us after the show if you're interested.

ARCHIBALD

Theeeee end.

Pause.

ARCHIBALD

Just kidding we wouldn't leave you guys hanging like that.

EUPHEMIA

Let's let these two wrap it up.

SCENE FIVE.

Very early the next morning.

Dawn has not broken yet.

ASHFORD sits in the drawing room, trying to read a book but having trouble focusing.

After a moment, LYDIA enters.

LYDIA

It's still dark out.

ASHFORD

I know.

LYDIA

I was awake all night.

ASHFORD

As was I.

LYDIA

I was drawing.

I couldn't stop, it was like...

Short pause.

LYDIA

I love it. Designing a structure, deciding what its dimensions will be, its purpose.

Puzzling out how to make the impractical practical.

ASHFORD

You have a true talent for it.

You'll make a formidable architect.

LYDIA

I'm not going to build the folly.

Short pause.

ASHFORD

No?

LYDIA

No. Not on this land, anyway.

She lays a piece of paper on the table.

LYDIA

I'm going to build this.

ASHFORD

What is it?

LYDIA

A new design. My favorite one yet.

He examines the paper.

After a moment, he realizes what she has drawn.

ASHFORD

...It's a deer sanctuary.

LYDIA
Yes.

ASHFORD looks at the details of the design, overwhelmed.

LYDIA
I couldn't stop myself from adding a few, ahem, *whimsical* details.
We must have some fun.

He looks at her.

ASHFORD
We?

LYDIA
I thought
Well, I thought we might do it together.
Not just this project, but others.
I thought we might be a good team.

Pause.

ASHFORD
Business partners.

LYDIA
If you like. We can be just that.

He turns away from her.

LYDIA
But if you'd like to be – something more.
Then. I would be very happy.
I would be –

He kisses her.

LYDIA
Shall I take that as a yes?

He nods.

They are so happy.

LYDIA
I like you at a loss for words.

ASHFORD

Then let me say yes again –

They kiss.

Snow falls outside, but in here it is warm and bright.

Lights out.

End of play.