Side 1 - Jane Austen Monologue

ACT ONE

Lights up.

There's a bench stage right to suggest seating in a home or inside a carriage, and two chairs stage left beside a small writing table, topped by a quill pen, writing paper, and an ink bottle. Upstage right, there's a chair and a chest of drawers or cabinet.

A call-bell sits on a small table or bell stand upstage center. When the underlined, bolded words with an asterisk (*) are spoken, someone rings the call-bell on stage, to signal that the title (or part of the title) of an Austen novel has been mentioned.

SOUND CUE: INTRO MUSIC.

Our narrator, a cheerful, cheeky, and wise JANE AUSTEN enters and addresses the audience. She never leaves the stage.

INTRO MUSIC ENDS.

Start

JANE AUSTEN

Welcome ladies and gentlemen. I am Jane Austen. It is a truth universally acknowledged that—to my humble astonishment—the six novels which I wrote at a cottage in Hampshire more than two centuries ago have achieved a certain level of popularity in the modern world.

I see my name mentioned so often today and with such unanticipated admiration, that it makes me blush. Who could have imagined that I would one day adorn the ten-pound note? To think that over thirty million copies of my books have been sold worldwide. If only I could collect my royalties! However, to my delight, I have been permitted to appear before you to express my appreciation to my followers and—to adopt a new term, my "fans."

I am delighted to be your host for a unique entertainment: all six of my novels, contracted to their essence, will be presented in the order in which they were published. I am indebted to my cast...

The CAST enters quickly from various places and strikes stylish poses.

...who will portray a variety of characters from my books. By necessity we shall move through each story at a lightning pace, so hold onto your bonnets and do try to keep up! Please feel free, should the impulse strike you, to laugh, applaud, cheer, or even boo. Now, without further ado... Let us begin, shall we, with the first of my books to appear in print: ***Sense and Sensibility.****

***DING!** The call-bell rings.* End

Side 2 - Col. Brandon, Elinor, Mrs. Dashwood, Marianne, Edward, Jane Austen, Willoughby

START

COLONEL BRANDON
Pray allow me to acquaint you with the true character of Mr. John Willoughby. Perhaps knowing the truth might ease Miss Marianne's suffering.

ELINOR
I am listening.

COLONEL BRANDON
Some time ago, Mr. Willoughby seduced a sweet, impressionable young lady—my ward, Miss Eliza Williams—then abandoned her to an impoverished existence, though she was pregnant with his child.

ELINOR
This is beyond everything!

COLONEL BRANDON
I had no choice but to challenge him to a duel.

ELINOR
A duel??

MRS. DASHWOOD and MARIANNE enter.

MRS. DASHWOOD
Wait just a minute!

MARIANNE
What's this about a duel?

EDWARD
I don't remember a duel in ***Sense and Sensibility.****

JANE AUSTEN
That's because you weren't paying attention. They messed it up entirely in the 2008 mini-series by depicting it as a fencing bout, when it was obviously pistols at dawn.

COLONEL BRANDON
We met by appointment. He to defend, I to punish his conduct.

WILLOUGHBY enters with toy pistols, hands one to COLONEL BRANDON.

WILLOUGHBY
(To the audience) Just to be clear: this is a flashback.

JANE AUSTEN
(The duel director) Gentlemen, take your places!

WILLOUGHBY and COLONEL BRANDON take their places, facing each other at opposite ends of the stage.

EDWARD

Hold on. Aren't they supposed to stand back-to-back and walk away from each other for ten paces?

JANE AUSTEN

That is the French method of dueling. This is the British method.

EDWARD, MRS. DASHWOOD, MARIANNE, and ELINOR

Ohhh!

JANE AUSTEN

Are you ready?

COLONEL BRANDON

Yes!

COLONEL BRANDON expertly cocks his weapon. WILLOUGHBY, in a panic, struggles to cock his pistol.

WILLOUGHBY

NO!

He sinks to his knees in terror.

Dear God! Take pity on me! You're a colonel in the army! I'm a spoiled dandy. I've never shot a pistol in my life!

COLONEL BRANDON

You're a villain and you deserve to die!

ELINOR

Colonel Brandon is such a bad ass!

MRS. DASHWOOD

He is just as theatrical and melodramatic as Marianne!

WILLOUGHBY

Don't kill me!!!

EDWARD

(To COLONEL BRANDON) Just pretend to miss.

JANE AUSTEN

(Straining for patience) Are you ready?? Aim. Fire!

WILLOUGHBY fires inexpertly. COLONEL BRANDON deliberately fires up at the sky. SOUND CUE: GUNSHOT.

EVERYONE

BANG!

JANE AUSTEN

Thankfully no one was wounded, and the duel was not widely known.

EVERYONE sighs in relief. WILLOUGHBY, MRS. DASHWOOD, and EDWARD exit.

JANE AUSTEN

Although Marianne could not deny that Willoughby was a rascal, still her heart was breaking. When she learned that he had indeed married Miss Grey for her £50,000, it was the final straw.

MARIANNE

How could Willoughby do this to me? After all that we meant to each other? I want to die! I shall run out in a thunderstorm and catch a fever!

MARIANNE races around in a frenzy of grief. SOUND CUE: THUNDERCLAP. MARIANNE drops to the floor.

ELINOR

Oh no: she really is dying. Marianne do not leave me. Oh! If only my mother were here!

COLONEL BRANDON and MRS. DASHWOOD enter.

COLONEL BRANDON

(To the audience) I have proved my worth by selflessly rushing to Barton Cottage to fetch Mrs. Dashwood.

COLONEL BRANDON assists MRS. DASHWOOD to MARIANNE's side, then exits.

MRS. DASHWOOD

Marianne dearest. I am here. *(Feels MARIANNE's forehead)* Your fever has broken. Thank God you shall live!

MARIANNE

(She rises) I have been so wrong and selfish, Elinor. I have learned my lesson. I should have been more like you.

ELINOR

I agree. But I am too good to say so.

MARIANNE

What ever happened to your Edward Ferrars? He was plain and slow of speech, but I know you liked each other.

ELINOR

Edward has been secretly engaged these past four years to Lucy Steele, and I just heard they were married.

MARIANNE

No! Are you serious? Who wrote this novel? Is it a romance or a tragedy?!

They glare at JANE AUSTEN.

JANE AUSTEN

Perhaps a bit of both?

END

Side 3 - Mr. Bingley, Mr. Darcy, Elizabeth, Jane Bennet,
Mrs. Bennet, Jane Austen, Wickham, Lydia, Mr. Collins, Lady Catherine

JANE AUSTEN

...where a charming newcomer, Mr. Bingley, dances with the eldest Bennet daughter, Jane.

BINGLEY and JANE BENNET meet on the dance floor. It is love at first sight. They dance while MRS. BENNET and ELIZABETH BENNET watch. MR. DARCY stands apart in haughty silence.

MRS. BENNET

Our Jane and Mr. Bingley make a fine pair do not you think, Lizzie?

JANE AUSTEN

Meet Elizabeth Bennet, the heroine of our story.

ELIZABETH

I agree, Mama. Mr. Bingley seems most amiable.

MRS. BENNET

But who is that gentleman Mr. Bingley brought with him to the ball?

BALLROOM MUSIC ENDS. MR. BINGLEY and JANE BENNET bow and curtsy and chat amiably.

MR. DARCY

I am Fitzwilliam Darcy. I am twice as rich as Bingley, three times as good-looking, and ten times as intelligent. I'm a **proud** man. And **proud** of it. So, sue me.

He pauses for the bell and rephrases.

I am brimming with **pride.***

MR. BENNET enters and joins THE BENNETS.

MRS. BENNET

(To ELIZABETH) I just heard that Mr. Darcy has ten thousand a year!

MR. BENNET

Why does everyone always comment upon how much money people make in these novels? It is so uncivil.

MRS. BENNET

Mr. Bennet! You did not even attend this ball. Go home!

MR. BENNET

Oh!

MR. BENNET exits. JANE BENNET joins ELIZABETH and MRS. BENNET. BINGLEY joins MR. DARCY.

START **MR. BINGLEY**

I say, Darcy. What a delightful evening. I have never seen so many pretty girls.

MR. DARCY

You have been dancing with the only handsome girl in the room.

MR. BINGLEY

Oh, yes! Miss Jane Bennet is the most beautiful creature I've ever beheld.

ELIZABETH

Sister dear: I think Charles Bingley is very taken with you.

JANE BENNET

(Shyly) Oh surely not, Lizzie! We have only just met.

ELIZABETH

I wouldn't be surprised if he offered for your hand tomorrow.

MR. BINGLEY

(To MR. DARCY) Miss Bennet's sister Elizabeth is also very pretty, and I dare say very agreeable.

MR. DARCY

She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me.

ELIZABETH

(Amused) I heard that!

MRS. BENNET

What a rude, insufferable man.

JANE BENNET

How dare he snub you, Lizzie?

MRS. BENNET

I can never forgive him.

ELIZABETH

(Laughing) I can laugh at him, but I can never like him.

MR. BINGLEY, JANE BENNET, and MRS. BENNET exit. ELIZABETH and MR. DARCY slowly circle each other.

JANE AUSTEN

The next time they meet, however, Mr. Darcy's opinion of Elizabeth Bennet has changed.

MR. DARCY

(He's falling for her, despite himself) She is very witty, intelligent, and accomplished. And she has very fine eyes.

ELIZABETH

(Still amused) I still cannot like him.

JANE AUSTEN

A new militia officer arrives in Meryton: Mr. Wickham.

MR. WICKHAM, a charming cad in a militia redcoat and hat, enters. Bitterly, to the audience.

WICKHAM

Darcy has treated me abominably ill since childhood. And he stole my living from me.

ELIZABETH

Poor Mr. Wickham! That Mr. Darcy is insufferable.

JANE AUSTEN

Meanwhile, Elizabeth's fifteen-year-old sister Lydia is a thoughtless flirt.

LYDIA BENNET, a vain, self-centered girl, enters and flirts with WICKHAM.

LYDIA

Oooh! How I love an officer in a red coat!

WICKHAM

And how I adore pretty young ladies who are fifteen years of age.

LYDIA and WICKHAM laugh and flirt outrageously. She steals his hat, giggles, and runs off.

You scamp! Don't make me chase you!

WICKHAM chases LYDIA off stage. MRS. BENNET enters.

MRS. BENNET

How strange and disappointing. Mr. Bingley and his friends have left the neighborhood without a word.

ELIZABETH

Why did they leave? It is obvious that Mr. Bingley and my sister Jane are in love.

JANE AUSTEN

Elizabeth is further dismayed when she receives a proposal of marriage from her insipid cousin, the clergyman Mr. Collins.

MR. COLLINS, an awkward, pompous, insufferable prig, enters.

MR. COLLINS

Mrs. Bennet, I desire an audience with your daughter, Miss Elizabeth.

MRS. BENNET

(Delighted) I shall leave the room at once.

ELIZABETH

Mama. Pray do not go!

MRS. BENNET

You will speak to him, Lizzie!

MRS. BENNET gives ELIZABETH a stern nudge, then exits.

MR. COLLINS

I believe it right and proper for every clergyman to marry. And I am convinced it will add very greatly to my happiness. As I am to inherit your father's house one day, what do you say, Miss Elizabeth? Shall we get hitched?

ELIZABETH

No thank you.

MR. COLLINS

You refuse me? You cannot be serious! My patroness is the honorable Lady Catherine de Bourgh!

ELIZABETH

Might I suggest that you ask my best friend, Charlotte Lucas? She is hard up and would take you like a shot.

MR. COLLINS

Thanks for the tip.

MR. COLLINS exits.

JANE AUSTEN

Elizabeth visits the newly married Mr. and Mrs. Collins, where meets the pompous and wealthy Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

LADY CATHERINE enters. She is arrogant and imperious.

LADY CATHERINE

How odd that you and all your sisters are out at the same time, Miss Bennet.

ELIZABETH

Well, Lady Catherine, it would have proven impossible to hold back my youngest sister Lydia.

JANE AUSTEN

Indeed. That horse had already left the barn.

LADY CATHERINE

I beg your pardon?

JANE AUSTEN

Never mind.

LADY CATHERINE

Pray do not get any ideas, Miss Bennet, about my nephew, Fitzwilliam Darcy. He is to marry my daughter Anne.

ELIZABETH

Don't worry, the man doesn't even like me.

LADY CATHERINE exits.

END

Side 4 - Austen Fans, Jane Austen

EVERYONE *(O.S., and hopefully the audience)*
No!

JANE AUSTEN
I'm glad to see that we're all on the same page.

HENRY CRAWFORD and MARY CRAWFORD exit.

AUSTEN FAN #1 and AUSTEN FAN #2 rush up to JANE AUSTEN in excitement and awe.

START **AUSTEN FAN #1**
Miss Austen! Forgive us for interrupting again. But I'm the president of the Jane Austen Society of North America. And we'd so appreciate an interview!

AUSTEN FAN #2
There are so many things we're dying to ask you!

JANE AUSTEN
No one said anything about a Q&A. But I'll allow it. Three questions.

AUSTEN FAN #2
Only three? Okay. Um. The writing table you used when composing your classic novels is SO tiny! Did you ever consider getting something larger?

AUSTEN FAN #1
That's the burning question you've longed to ask her?

JANE AUSTEN
I wrote anonymously in my dining room, so small was better. If a visitor entered the chamber, I could cover my work with a blotter as if I were just writing a letter.

AUSTEN FAN #1 and #2
Ohhh!

AUSTEN FAN #1
Were any of your characters based on real people?

JANE AUSTEN
They all were in some fashion. I observed people around me. It fed my imagination. I mixed in my own thoughts, fears, and feelings. What you read is the result.

AUSTEN FAN #1 and #2
Ohhh!

AUSTEN FAN #2
(Yearningly) Your sister Cassandra said if you ever fell in love, it was with an unnamed gentleman you met at the seaside. Who was he?

JANE AUSTEN
Ah. My seaside gentleman. A lady never tells.

AUSTEN FAN #1 and #2
(Disappointed) Oh.

AUSTEN FAN #2
You didn't really answer that one, did you, so can we get one more? Like, is it true you actually had to pay to publish your first novel?

JANE AUSTEN
I did. Thank goodness I had my brother Henry's financial backing.

AUSTEN FAN #1
And the rest is history.

AUSTEN FAN #2
You're not only a genius, Miss Austen, you're an inspiration for self-published authors everywhere.

JANE AUSTEN
You are kind to say so. And now, that's a wrap!

AUSTEN FAN #1
Can we get a selfie?

JANE AUSTEN
Sure.

The threesome poses. AUSTEN FAN #1 takes the selfie with her phone.

AUSTEN FAN #2
We love you, Jane Austen!

AUSTEN FAN #1
Thank you so much!

JANE AUSTEN
Thank you.

END

AUSTEN FAN #1 and AUSTEN FAN #2 exit. GENTLEMAN enters and rings the next four bells.

Now let us pick up where we left off, shall we, and proceed to my fourth published novel, *Emma*.*

We set the scene for book four. MR. KNIGHTLEY, a down-to-earth, respectable gentleman, enters with MR. WOODHOUSE, a nervous hypochondriac who always wears a warm shawl. They bring in a small easel with a hilariously bad portrait that Emma painted of Harriet Smith. EMMA WOODHOUSE, smart and quick-witted, enters and proudly addresses the audience.

EMMA
At last! I thought you would never get around to me.

Side 5 - Jane Austen, Emma, Harriet, Mr. Knightley, Mr. Elton, Miss Bates

START

MR. KNIGHTLEY helps MR. WOODHOUSE off as they both exit.

JANE AUSTEN

With her governess married off, our heroine finds herself without a companion and nothing to do.

EMMA

I am booooooored to distraction. So, I have decided to take a clueless young lady of uncertain parentage under my wing and make a project of her: Harriet Smith. Hello Harriet.

HARRIET SMITH enters. She's a simple, gawky, unsophisticated girl.

HARRIET

Miss Woodhouse! You will never guess what has happened. I have received a proposal of marriage from Mr. Robert Martin.

EMMA

Not Robert Martin the farmer? Oh no, Harriet, that will never do.

HARRIET

Whyever not?

EMMA

You are destined for greater things.

HARRIET

I am?

EMMA

Never fear, I shall orchestrate your entire love life for you, Harriet You have only to do exactly as I persuade and instruct.

HARRIET

Very well, Miss Woodhouse.

She moves away.

GENTLEMAN #1 enters and rings the next two bells.

MR. KNIGHTLEY enters.

MR. KNIGHTLEY

Emma!* Can it be true? Did Harriet Smith actually turn down an offer from Robert Martin?

EMMA

She did. What of it?

MR. KNIGHTLEY

This was your doing, Emma.* *(annoyed by the bell)* and no good will come of it.

JANE AUSTEN shoos off GENTLEMAN #1, delicately picks up the bell, and holds it to silence it, before returning it to its place.

EMMA

Oh, don't let us quarrel, Mr. Knightley.

MR. KNIGHTLEY exits.

JANE AUSTEN

Emma has a plan—that Harriet will marry their clergyman, Mr. Elton.

MR. ELTON, a narcissistic, ambitious vicar, enters.

EMMA

Mr. Elton! How good of you to call. May I introduce you to my friend, Miss Smith?

MR. ELTON

Miss Who?

He picks up and examines the horrible portrait Emma painted of Harriet.

Oh! Miss Woodhouse! Did you paint this portrait?

MMA

I did.

MR. ELTON

It is extraordinary. Such a work of art! But who can the subject be?

EMMA

Miss Smith.

She gestures to HARRIET.

MR. ELTON

Ah. Pray, allow me to have the portrait framed for you.

EMMA

Thank you.

MR. ELTON stows the portrait and crosses to a bench that will serve as a carriage.

You see, Harriet? Mr. Elton likes you so well, he insists on framing your picture!

HARRIET

I am too thrilled for words!

HARRIET exits.

JANE AUSTEN

While returning from a party one evening, Miss Woodhouse finds herself alone in a carriage with an impassioned Mr. Elton.

SOUND CUE: A MOVING CARRIAGE. MR. ELTON and EMMA bounce along on a bench that serves as a "carriage."

MR. ELTON

Miss Woodhouse! I am ready to die of love for you. Please say that you return my feelings and will be my wife!

EMMA

Mr. Elton! You forget yourself. You mean to address these attentions to Miss Smith.

MR. ELTON

Miss Smith?? Who can think of Miss Smith, when Miss Woodhouse is near? Surely, from the encouragement I received—

EMMA

What encouragement? This has all been a great mistake! I have no thoughts of matrimony at present, sir.

MR. ELTON

I am too angry to say another word!

MR. ELTON exits.

MR. WOODHOUSE and MR. KNIGHTLEY enter. EMMA joins them.

JANE AUSTEN

A month later, Miss Woodhouse is at Hartfield with her father and Mr. Knightley.

MR. KNIGHTLEY

Emma.* I have a piece of news for you.

EMMA

I always like news. What is it?

JANE AUSTEN

Just then, a visitor comes to call.

MISS BATES enters.

MISS BATES

I am Miss Bates, the humble village spinster.

JANE AUSTEN

Miss Bates's life is devoted to the care of an ailing mother and the endeavor to make a small income go a long way. She does tend to prattle on. But she's a happy, kind woman and everybody in Highbury thinks of her with good will. Well, almost everybody.

EMMA

(To the audience) I feel sorry for Miss Bates. A single woman with a very narrow income must be a ridiculous, disagreeable old maid.

END

Side 6 - John Thorpe, Henry Tilney, Catherine, General Tilney

START

JOHN THORPE

You agreed to ride with me and ride you shall! *(Long, nasty laugh.)*

JOHN THORPE exits. CATHERINE leaves the "carriage." HENRY TILNEY enters.

JANE AUSTEN

Later, a mortified Catherine apologizes to the Tilneys, and they walk together to Beecham Cliff.

HENRY TILNEY

Since I am the hero of this piece, I shall speak charmingly and at length about art, poetry, and literature. Are you fond of reading, Miss Morland?

CATHERINE

Oh yes. Ever so fond! *(Hesitantly)* But I dare say, you, being a gentleman, never read novels?

HENRY TILNEY

Miss Morland. The person, be it gentleman or lady, who hast not pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid.

CATHERINE

(Thrilled) Oh! I feared novels would not be clever enough for you. Have you read *The Mysteries of Udolpho*?

HENRY TILNEY

I could not put it down. I finished it in two days, my hair standing on end the whole time.

CATHERINE

It was the same for me!

HENRY TILNEY

I have read hundreds and hundreds of novels. I enjoy history as well.

CATHERINE

History would be more interesting if it wasn't just about men. There are hardly any women in it!

HENRY TILNEY

True. But then remember, history is mainly written by men.

They share a laugh as they bow, curtsy.

JANE AUSTEN

Catherine and Mr. Tilney spend the afternoon engaged in delightful conversation and they part fascinated by each other.

HENRY TILNEY exits.

CATHERINE

Oh, Miss Austen! Mr. Tilney is so intelligent, and he has such fine ideas. I admire him so!

JANE AUSTEN

I must admit, I'm a little bit in love with him myself. *(She smiles)* In short order, Catherine meets Henry Tilney's father, the imperious General Tilney.

- *GENERAL TILNEY enters.*

GENERAL TILNEY

Miss Morland, my family and I intend to return home tomorrow. Would you do me the honor of accompanying us to Northanger Abbey?*

CATHERINE

Would I! How wonderful that General Tilney should invite me, a nobody. I do hope his house will be a haunted ruin, like those in the Gothic romances I have been reading.

LIGHTING CUE: DARK SPOOKY HOUSE effect.

JANE AUSTEN

The Tilney's house is indeed ancient and fascinating, but upon arrival it seems perfectly proper and well-preserved. That is, until night falls and a storm rages. There is thunder and lightning.

Pause. Nothing happens.

There is THUNDER and LIGHTNING!

SOUND CUE: THUNDER. LIGHTING CUE: LIGHTNING.

Thank you.

CATHERINE investigates, carrying a lit candle.

CATHERINE

Rain beats like a drum against the windowpanes. How violent wind shakes the shutters and roars down the chimneys! I cl sleep. This old house is hiding a dark secret—I can feel it. I mus of courage and seek it out.

JANE AUSTEN

Catherine goes exploring.

CATHERINE

How dark it is, with only the feeble rays of a single candle to light my way. Every hallway resembles another. Will I meet a villain in disguise? Or a midnight assassin? Oh! A door! What should I find if I dared to enter? A small, vaulted room? A dagger? An instrument of torture? Drops of blood?? I shall be brave. I will go in!

CATHERINE "enters." SOUND CUE: CREAKING DOOR. LIGHTING CUE: LIGHTS UP on her apartment. She frowns in disappointment.

Oh. It is only my own apartment again. But surely someone died in that bed!

She spies a chest of drawers.

And what is that mysterious cabinet? It did not catch my notice before. Could something be concealed within?

She opens a drawer, takes out an old, yellowed page with writing on it.

Look! A piece of paper covered in writing! How long has it been hidden there? This must be a manuscript of great import. What does it say? My candle is too dim. I cannot make it out.

SOUND/LIGHT CUE: THUNDER and LIGHTNING. JOHN THORPE enters laughing maniacally, wielding a bloody axe.

JOHN THORPE

Hahahaha!

CATHERINE SCREAMS and runs for her life. He chases her round and round.

JANE AUSTEN

Stop! Stop!

CATHERINE and JOHN THORPE stop and turn to JANE AUSTEN.

What are you doing? There is no axe murderer in ***Northanger Abbey.****

JOHN THORPE

I just thought it'd be funny. Gothic romances are full of murder and mayhem, aren't they?

JANE AUSTEN

Yes, but this book is a parody of that genre, which was all the rage at the time. It's the first novel I ever wrote and sold, even though it wasn't published until many years later—long after I had learned the value of writing about real people in recognizable circumstances.

CATHERINE

So, you're saying that all your other books were a new style?

JANE AUSTEN

Yes. That's why they called them "novel."

CATHERINE and JOHN THORPE

Ohhh!

JANE AUSTEN

Let us rewind, shall we?

END