

Revised Script

PERSUADED BY AUSTEN

Kathy Reid

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CHARACTER LIST

Phillip Wright	The vain and self-satisfied Chairman of Harrington Players who plays Sir Walter Elliot, Mr Charles Musgrove and Captain Harville. He thinks he is Laurence Olivier but is a terrible ham.
Brenda Hill	Phillip's girlfriend who plays Lady Russell, Mrs Mary Musgrove, Lady Darymple and Mrs Croft. She preens herself and Phillip and is over-proud of how they look and how good they are at acting.
Geraldine Wright	Phillip's eldest daughter and a chip off the old block. She plays Anne Elliot in an over-dramatic manner not much better than her father's.
Anita Wright	Phillip's younger daughter who is director throughout and plays Anne Elliot in Act Two. She is highly organised, responsible and works harder than everybody to make her adaptation of Persuasion a success.
Michelle Stevens	Anita's supportive best friend who plays Elizabeth Elliot and Louisa Musgrove.
Marshall Davis	The inscrutable professional actor who plays Captain Wentworth.
Gordon Taylor	The ever helpful and kind stage manager who also plays Mr Elliot.
Bill and Bob	The cheeky lighting and sound technicians who are never seen or heard.

PLAYERS IN JANE AUSTEN'S PERSUASION

Anne Elliot	Act One – Geraldine Wright and Act Two – Anita Wright		
Sir Walter Elliot	Phillip Wright	Elizabeth Elliot	Michelle Stevens
Lady Russell	Brenda Hill	Captain Wentworth	Marshall Davis
Louisa Musgrove	Michelle Stevens	Charles Musgrove	Phillip Wright
Mary Musgrove	Brenda Hill	Mr Elliot	Gordon Taylor
Captain Harville	Phillip Wright	Lady Darymple	Brenda Hill
Mrs Croft	Brenda Hill		

SETTING

This play within a play needs no distinction of set. The Harrington Players live out their 'real' dramas on the same stage as where they rehearse Persuasion. All Players enter and exit the stage unless the stage direction indicates 'auditorium' at which point they enter through the audience. As the director, Anita can position herself to one side of the stage

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ACT ONE

SCENE 1

Tab's Open. The Harrington players rehearse an opening scene of Anita Wright's adaptation of Persuasion by Jane Austen. With five weeks until the production the actors are not in costume and the set of the drawing room of Kellynch Hall is far from finished with debris strewn around the floor. The actors have mostly learnt their lines but some, particularly Geraldine, falter badly and attempt to hide their heavy use of the script.

Lady Russell and Anne sit at a table. Regency music plays briefly.

ANNE: Lady...

Regency music plays, then stops.

ANNE: Lady...

Regency music plays, then stops then plays, then stops. Geraldine shoots a dirty look to the lighting box.

ANNE: (loudly) Lady Russell this is a most delicate matter.

LADY RUSSELL: I know my child.

ANNE: While my mother lived...

LADY RUSSELL: Yes Anne, your dear mother, my most valued friend.

ANNE: While she lived there was method...

Geraldine stumbles and finds her script under the table.

ANNE: ...method, moderation and economy which kept father within his income but with her died all such right-mindedness. He is growing distressed for money.

LADY RUSSELL: You wish to call on me to advise you?

Gordon the stagehand rushes on and around the stage picking up debris. Actors carry on regardless.

ANNE: Indeed. It is our duty to clear away the claims of all our creditors.

Anne pulls out a huge stack of papers. Gordon tries to take them and a silent tug of war ensues.

LADY RUSSELL: (unaware) You must retrench, of that there is no doubt but let us have it done with the least possible pain to Sir Walter and your sister? Let us work on a plan of economy. If we can persuade your father to this much can be done.

ANNE: Thank you. You are most kind.

LADY RUSSELL: May I see these?

Lights low. Regency music plays for too long. Phillip enters. Michelle and Geraldine peep from behind curtain.

PHILLIP: (wearily) Thank you Bob. Thank you Bill. This is a short transition.

The lights flash as an ok.

PHILLIP: Why are they here? It's too early for tech.
Blackout and raspberry sound. Michelle laughs and exits.

GERALDINE: The intercom Dad! Remember the intercom!

PHILLIP: Sorry guys. Only joking. Can we carry on. Please.

Phillip begins to exit and is held up by Geraldine.

GERALDINE: You've got to be more careful.

PHILLIP: As chairman of the Harrington Players I'll say what I like.

Lights up. Sir Walter and Elizabeth enter and strut around. Sir Walter collects tea upstage.

SIR WALTER: This is not to be borne.

ELIZABETH: Not to be borne.

SIR WALTER: What! Every comfort of life knocked off!
Journeys, London, servants, horses, table -
restrictions and constrictions everywhere.

ELIZABETH: Everywhere.

The action stops. Phillip stands stock still in front of a large object on the floor. There's nowhere to put his cup.

PHILLIP: Gordon! I can't tolerate this. Where are you?
Useless. Totally useless.

BRENDA: Imbecile.

GERALDINE: He tries, but really.

PHILLIP: Why do we put up with him?

Gordon rushes on out of breath.

GORDON: Yes Phillip?

PHILLIP: (pointing to object) Look at this. What do you call this?

GORDON: I've only just...

PHILLIP: I can't work like this. It's a health and safety
...It's a health and safety...

BRENDA: Disaster.

PHILLIP: Disaster.

GORDON: I'm doing my best. I can't do everything. I can't be everywh...

PHILLIP: Sort it out. We don't want any accidents. The group can't afford to be sued. Tidy this. Now.

Gordon tugs at his fetlock and picks up the large object in front of Phillip's feet. Phillip is still holding his cup.

GORDON: Yes Boss. Of course B...

BRENDA: A good tidy up is needed.

GERALDINE: You can do that can't you Gordon?

GORDON: Yes Boss. Of c...

Gordon stops to look longingly into Geraldine's eyes. Geraldine turns away.

LADY RUSSELL: Sir Walter I appreciate...

Anita Wright silently enters the auditorium and observes.

SIR WALTER: To live no longer with the decencies even of a private gentleman! I would sooner quit Kellynch-hall.

Phillip tries to find something to sit on and clears his throat. Gordon rushes on with a chair. Phillip puts his cup down hard on the floor.

ELIZABETH: I would sooner quit Kellynch-hall.

LADY RUSSELL: Quit Kellynch-hall?

Geraldine reads from her script with no feeling.

ANNE: Yes. Why not settle in a small house in our own neighbourhood where we might still have Lady Russell's society, still be near sister Mary and still have the pleasure of sometimes seeing the lawns and groves of Kellynch?

SIR WALTER: A small house? Have you lost leave of your senses? I refuse to compromise my dignity or relinquish my comforts or be obliged to see my home in the hands of others.

ELIZABETH: Indeed.

LADY RUSSELL: Sir Walter, Elizabeth, nothing can be done without a change of abode. You should not alter your style of living which has such a character of hospitality and ancient dignity. I presume to observe that there are two alternatives.

SIR WALTER: Two alternatives?

LADY RUSSELL: London or Bath.

SIR WALTER: I'm for London. I think more of London.

ELIZABETH: I'm for London.

LADY RUSSELL: Sir Walter, Bath has many advantages over London.

SIR WALTER: I'm for London.

LADY RUSSELL: Bath is a much safer place for a gentleman in your predicament. You might there be important at comparatively little expense.

SIR WALTER: I'm for Bath.

ELIZABETH: I'm for Bath.

LADY RUSSELL: Very well. I am fond of Bath and disposed to think it will suit you all.

SIR WALTER: Come Elizabeth let us prepare for Bath.

ELIZABETH: For Bath.

ANNE: But...

Anne is ignored and Sir Walter turns to exit.

SIR WALTER: My Anne how faded and thin you look.

ANNE: Do I father?

PHILLIP: Yes Geraldine, you look tired.

Geraldine gives her father a light smack. Sir Walter and Elizabeth exit. Lady Russell turns to Anne in shock.

LADY RUSSELL: My dear Anne. I am most grieved...

ANNE: (*getting up*) Do not concern yourself Lady Russell. I have become...

Geraldine slips out of character.

GERALDINE: Who wrote this? Could the language be any more stilted?

BRENDA: I agree.

ANNE: Those are Jane Austen's words.

Geraldine and Brenda move on. Lady Russell consoles Anne. Scene ends. Phillip and Michelle enter back onto stage.

BRENDA: Good job Geraldine. I could feel your pain.

GERALDINE: You did a great job too Brenda.

BRENDA: Thank you.

GERALDINE: No, thank you.

BRENDA: No, thank you.

PHILLIP: What about me?

BRENDA: (*kissing him*) Marvellous darling.

GERALDINE: Dad you were excellent.

MICHELLE: How about me?

GERALDINE: You were excellent too Brenda.

MICHELLE: And me?

BRENDA: Thank you Geraldine.

ANITA: Sorry to interrupt. There's a lot of work still needed on this.

MICHELLE: How true.

PHILLIP: How rude!

BRENDA: How rude!

Geraldine gets a dig in the ribs from Phillip.

GERALDINE: Ouch! How rude!

ANITA: Michelle I see Elizabeth as being more spiteful towards Anne. To her Anne is a completely useless sister who has absolutely no say in where the family should live. I want this Persuasion to show Anne's struggles with her family and how she learns to stand up for what she wants.

MICHELLE: (to Anita) Now I know why you chose this one. (openly) How would you like me to do that Anita?

ANITA: More condescending side glances and sneers.

MICHELLE: No problem.

Michelle grins cheerily to Geraldine who sneers back.

ANITA: Gerry, Anne needs to be contained, upright and stiff? We want the audience to feel the discomfort she must conceal.

GERALDINE: I was doing that. Are you blind?

ANITA: Well, do it more.

GERALDINE: Yes Sis. No Sis. Whatever you say Sis.

Geraldine catches Phillip's eye and they both laugh. Anita speaks into the wings.

ANITA: Gordon can you get hold of some side tables. They need somewhere to put their cups?

PHILLIP: You can say that again. Total farce.

Gordon runs onto the stage.

GORDON: (jokingly) Yes Boss. Will do.

ANITA: Two should do.

GORDON: No problem Boss.

Gordon is about to run off when Geraldine steps in his path. Gordon is embarrassed and confused.

ANITA: That's all. Let's move on.

GERALDINE: Gordon, why "Yes Boss"?

GORDON: Anita's directing, she's the boss.

GERALDINE: Gordon?

GORDON: (not understanding) Sorry Gerry?

Geraldine arches her eyebrows.

GORDON: Sorry Geraldine?

Geraldine arches her eyebrows again.

GORDON: (cheekily) Sorry Miss Wright. Got to change the set for the next scene.

GERALDINE: No you don't. Not til I've set you straight on this for the millionth time.

ANITA: Gordon can you change the set please?
Gordon is about to exit.

GERALDINE: No you don't.

ANITA: Gordon. Let's not waste time. Five weeks to curtain up, remember.

GERALDINE: I need Gordon thank you.

ALL: Ooo!

MICHELLE: *(to Anita)* That'll make his day. Poor fool.

GERALDINE: I mean, I need to speak to Gordon for one minute.

ANITA: Please be quick.

GORDON: *(enjoying Geraldine's attention)* Fire away.
Geraldine signals for Gordon to follow her out of earshot.

GERALDINE: Gordon, don't be a moron. Anita isn't your boss. Phillip is chairman of The Harrington Players and he's in charge and when he's not around, as the vice-chairperson, I'm numero uno. Understand?

GORDON: You're so sexy when you get heated.

GERALDINE: Gordon! I don't want people thinking there's something going on when there's nothing going on.

GORDON: More's the pity.

GERALDINE: Stop the Yes Boss, unless it's to me or Dad. Ok?

GORDON: Ok Miss Wright. Boss. If you say so. And what about Brenda? Is she a boss?

GERALDINE: As Dad's girlfriend she deserves respect but she isn't on the committee so no.

GORDON: Right. Glad I've got that sorted.

GERALDINE: Make sure you remember.
Gordon looks over to Phillip and Brenda who are preening as ever and looking pleased with themselves but impatient.

GORDON: Strange. Anita never gives them direction.

GERALDINE: You've seen what happens if she tries.

GORDON: You have the most beautiful eyes.
Geraldine jumps with a start as Anita is behind them.

ANITA: Gerry, have you finished with Gordon?

PHILLIP: Yes, come on Gordon. Let's get on.

GORDON: *(looking pointedly at Geraldine)* Yes Boss.

BRENDA: Stop wasting time Gordon.

GORDON: (directed at Geraldine) Yes B, B, Brenda.

Geraldine shakes her head and turns her back on Gordon.

ANITA: Okay back to work. Onto the Uppercross scene.

Phillip's mobile phone rings and he answers it after the first ring. He turns his back on the rehearsal and walks to the side of the stage and talks loudly.

PHILLIP: Patrick. Hi. Great of you to call. Ya, ya, ya. (laughs) Really? Ya, ya, ya. Can he? Ya, ya, ya. Will he? Ya, ya, ya. Patrick that's wonderful. Thank you soooo much. Bye, bye.

Phillip is triumphant. Everybody expects him to say what is going on but instead he grabs Brenda and pulls her into the wings. Anita patiently flicks through the script.

MICHELLE: What on earth is going on?

GERALDINE: Don't ask me?

MICHELLE: He's your Dad. Who's this Patrick?

GERALDINE: How should I know.

Phillip and Brenda return in excitement.

PHILLIP: People, Harrington Players, guess what?

ALL: What?

BRENDA: Really good news?

ALL: What?

PHILLIP: This is so exciting.

ALL: What?

BRENDA: Phil has found the best man possible.

ALL: Who?

PHILLIP: Marshall Davis.

Anita stops in her tracks.

GERALDINE: Who?

PHILLIP: Marshall Davis. He will be our Wentworth.

No response.

PHILLIP: Marshall Davis. The professional actor.

No response.

PHILLIP: You must know Marshall Davis.

ALL: Who?

BRENDA: That gorgeous lad. We helped start his career. He was in our Noises Off.

Gordon pops up from somewhere he's been clearing the stage.

GORDON: The one with the blond hair.