



Jane Austen
Lady Susan

Read by **Harriet Walter • Kim Hicks • Carole Boyd**
and cast

**CLASSIC
FICTION**



NA222812D

1	Lady Susan Vernon to Mr Vernon, Langford, December	2:20
2	Lady Susan to Mrs Johnson, Langford	4:14
3	Mrs Vernon to Lady de Courcy, Churchill	3:42
4	Mr de Courcy to Mrs Vernon, Parklands	2:33
5	Lady Susan to Mrs Johnson, Churchill	3:26
6	Mrs Vernon to Mr de Courcy, Churchill	4:00
7	Lady Susan to Mrs Johnson, Churchill	4:09
8	Mrs Vernon to Lady de Courcy, Churchill	4:05
9	Mrs Johnson to Lady Susan, Edward Street	1:56
10	Lady Susan to Mrs Johnson, Churchill	3:33
11	Mrs Vernon to Lady de Courcy	2:03
12	Sir Reginald de Courcy to his son, Parklands	4:57
13	Lady de Courcy to Mrs Vernon, Parklands	2:13
14	Mr de Courcy to Sir Reginald, Churchill	5:26
15	Mrs Vernon to Lady de Courcy, Churchill	4:02
16	Lady Susan to Mrs Johnson, Churchill	3:32
17	Mrs Vernon to Lady de Courcy, Churchill	5:38
18	From the same to the same, Churchill	2:17
19	Lady Susan to Mrs Johnson, Churchill	3:24
20	Mrs Vernon to Lady de Courcy, Churchill	8:24
21	Miss Vernon to Mr de Courcy	2:05
22	Lady Susan to Mrs Johnson, Churchill	6:54

23	Mrs Vernon to Lady de Courcy, Churchill	4:49
24	From the same to the same, Churchill	14:03
25	Lady Susan to Mrs Johnson, Churchill	6:25
26	Mrs Johnson to Lady Susan, Edward Street	3:35
27	Mrs Vernon to Lady de Courcy, Churchill	2:15
28	Mrs Johnson to Lady Susan, Edward Street	1:54
29	Lady Susan to Mrs Johnson, Upper Seymour Street	1:59
30	Lady Susan to Mr de Courcy, Upper Seymour Street	4:33
31	Lady Susan to Mrs Johnson, Upper Seymour Street	1:35
32	Mrs Johnson to Lady Susan, Edward Street	1:48
33	Lady Susan to Mrs Johnson, Upper Seymour Street	0:43
34	Mr de Courcy to Lady Susan, Hotel	1:20
35	Lady Susan to Mr de Courcy, Upper Seymour Street	1:27
36	Mr de Courcy to Lady Susan, Hotel	2:04
37	Lady Susan to Mr de Courcy, Upper Seymour Street	1:12
38	Mrs Johnson to Lady Susan, Edward Street	1:55
39	Lady Susan to Mrs Johnson, Upper Seymour Street	1:59
40	Lady de Courcy to Mrs Vernon, Parklands	2:01
41	Mrs Vernon to Lady de Courcy, Churchill	3:01
42	Conclusion	6:46

Total time: 2:30:42

Jane Austen
Lady Susan

The Cast

Lady Susan Vernon	Harriet Walter
Mrs Catherine Vernon	Kim Hicks
Mrs Alicia Johnson	Carole Boyd
Reginald de Courcy	Jonathan Keeble
Sir Reg de Courcy	Nigel Anthony
Lady de Courcy	Patience Tomlinson
Frederica Vernon	Ruth Sillers

Jane Austen

Lady Susan

Even though **Lady Susan** is complete, and indisputably by Jane Austen herself, it has never been accepted at the level of the six great novels which were published during her lifetime, and which formed her reputation.

In 1805 – the year of the Battle of Trafalgar – Jane Austen herself made a ‘fair copy’ of the work which she almost certainly wrote about ten years earlier. We can place the date fairly accurately because the paper on which she wrote it has an 1805 watermark. She was engaged at the time on **Sense and Sensibility** (called at that time Elinor and Marianne) and she may have looked back rather wistfully at **Lady Susan** for a number of reasons.

First of all, its form – the letter novel – places it firmly in the eighteenth century. She liked the form and was accustomed to it: she particularly admired Samuel Richardson and Fanny Burney who both used the device extensively. And it was as a letter novel that Jane Austen wrote the first draft of **Sense and Sensibility**, before ultimately discarding the form for the third person narrator.

But although she copied out **Lady**

Susan, she made no attempt, as far as we know, to get it published – even later on, when presumably the author of **Pride and Prejudice**, **Persuasion** and **Emma** would have been able to do so. It was not published until 1871, 54 years after her death. The decision to publish was taken by her nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh and was made against some family opposition.

It is difficult to see why there was such reluctance to allow the work to be read by her huge following. It may be a book which, in form, looks back rather than forward; it may lack the subtleties of her six masterpieces, in the depth of characters, in the exquisite social observations and the sense of growing tension. But this is partly a fault of the limitations of the epistolary novel itself, which is constraining as the author struggles to develop the plot through a credible correspondence.

But there is no doubt that **Lady Susan** has an innate charm. For a start, the character of **Lady Susan** is sharp, consistent, and totally believable as she charms and manipulates those around her. Here is an unquestionably attractive,

intelligent 35-year-old widow, intent on making sure that the right consorts will be ensnared both for herself and for her 18-year-old daughter Frederica. And, against the odds (she openly admits her age is an impediment to catching a younger man, she aims high) she is confident in her ability to succeed. But it is as much her energetic duplicity and singular amorality which delights us as the melodrama in which she becomes involved.

Even as the net around her is drawn more closely, and she can see her target is slipping away, she maintains a dignity that is more pragmatic and direct than arrogant. More than anyone, she is aware that marriage and alliance is a battleground that needs to be traversed, and that sometimes it is necessary to make tactical withdrawals.

At the same time, we can feel the concern – but expressed in such gentlemanly terms – of the family of Mr de Courcy to protect their heir against the dangerous charms; and despite being attracted to the eponymous heroine for her sheer audacity, we want the young couple to get together in the end.

It must be said that our enjoyment of **Lady Susan** is enhanced because we read (or as here listen to it) through the memory of six masterpieces. The sentences and sentiments of Anne Elliott and Frederic

Wentworth in **Persuasion** or Elinor and Edward in **Sense and Sensibility** ring in our ears almost as a musical background. Those great novels set the tone for the appreciation of **Lady Susan** who, more typically, would have been a character on the fringes of the plot, rather than the centre. And without those mature novels to set the tone, it is certain that **Lady Susan** would be a very minor achievement in the Regency literary canon.

Yet that wise social smile, so lightly touched on the lips, which is the principal expression of Jane Austen, is perceptible in this early work. The language alone has an elegance and fleetness of foot that demands publication. It deserves to be taken out of the scholar's portfolio and placed in popular hands. Cast in the form of letters, it becomes a perfect candidate for presentation on audiobook, enabling the characters to become instantly flesh and blood.

And it deserves, without doubt, the ultimate accolade of twenty-first-century approbation – a film.

Notes by Nicolas Soames



Harriet Walter is best known for her two BBC TV roles as Charity in *The Men's Room* and as Amy in *Unfinished Business*. But she has an extensive and successful stage career winning many awards on the way including Best Actress by the Sony Radio Awards and a Laurence Olivier Award for Actress of the Year in a Revival for roles in *Twelfth Night*, *Three Sisters* and *A Question of Geography*. Her film credits include *Villa des Roses*, *Onegin*, *The Governess*, *Bedrooms and Hallways*, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, *Sense & Sensibility*. She also writes about the theatre, contributing to academic journals. Her first book, *Other People's Shoes*, is also based on her theatrical life.



Kim Hicks trained as an actor at the famous Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. She has worked in all areas of the profession but as a seventh generation theatrical has maintained the family Travelling Theatre tradition by touring her three acclaimed one-woman shows around the world: Jane Austen, Dorothy Parker and Victorian Shipboard Diaries are her subjects. Kim's love of storytelling has now found another outlet through the world of audiobooks.



Carole Boyd trained at the Birmingham School of Speech and Drama where she won the principal national prize for voice, the Carleton Hobbs Award, and immediately joined the BBC Radio Drama Company. Vocal versatility is her speciality, from her creation of the notorious character of Lynda Snell in *The Archers* to *Poetry Please* and all the female characters in *Postman Pat*. She has won two prestigious awards for her reading of Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Huth's *Landgirls*. She has also written and recorded her own audiobook, *Lynda Snell's History of Ambridge*.



Ruth Sillers began her career with the National Youth Theatre. Theatre work includes productions for the Royal National Theatre Studio and the Donmar Warehouse. She has performed in several plays for BBC Radio Drama, including Noel Coward's *Easy Virtue* and *Medical Detectives*. She also reads regularly for Radio 4 and BBC World Service.



Jonathan Keeble's theatre credits include leading roles at Manchester's Royal Exchange, Coventry, Liverpool, Exeter, Lancaster and West Yorkshire Playhouse. TV includes *People Like Us*, *The Two Of Us* and *Deptford Grafitti*. Jonathan has featured in over 250 radio plays for the BBC and was a member of the Radio Drama Company. For Naxos AudioBooks: *Black Beauty*, *Classic Chilling Tales*, *The Soldier's Tale*, *Macbeth* and *Oedipus the King*.



Nigel Anthony is one of Britain's leading voice actors with wide experience of reading for audiobooks and on radio. His extensive work for BBC Radio has won him two awards. Audiobook credits include *The Lady of the Camellias*, *The Alexandria Quartet*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Life of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart* for Naxos AudioBooks.



Patience Tomlinson has appeared extensively in theatre and radio in the UK. She has worked for the Royal National Theatre and the Young Vic, and was twice a member of the BBC Radio Drama Company. She has made over 1,500 broadcasts, including stories, books and radio plays as well as poetry.

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Jane Austen

Lady Susan

Read by **Harriet Walter • Kim Hicks • Carole Boyd** and cast

Lady Susan was the first of Jane Austen's novels to be completed. An epistolary novel in eighteenth-century style, it tells the story of the recently-widowed Lady Susan Vernon, intelligent but highly manipulative, who is intent on gaining financially secure relationships for both herself and her wayward but shy teenage daughter Frederica. Less known than Austen's six great later novels, it demonstrates the wit and sharp observations of Jane Austen – and is shown at its best in audiobook form – with a full cast bringing to life the individual letter-writers.

"Lady Susan is written in an epistolary style which, even when Austen produced it, harked back to an earlier literary age, but it has no less wit and sparkle than her six great novels. A masterful comic-character study.

This production shows where Naxos excels: classic material performed by top-class actors in a production enriched by music."

THE SUNDAY TIMES

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