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ENGL 4505

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Fanfiction

 I decided for my fanfiction piece to place a scene from Mansfield Park in a modern setting, high school. In reading Mansfield Park I have sympathy for Fanny which I do not think many modern readers share. She is shy and timid, which can be frustrating, but I feel that modern readers find this so problematic because we as a society favor extroverted personalities. I hope to make readers sympathize with Fanny and maybe not judge her as harshly by putting her in a modern setting. It is much easier to identify with Fanny’s feelings if they are placed in a situation where we also might have experienced these feelings. I think you can get more from reading Mansfield Park if you do not wish to scream at Fanny every five seconds.

 I chose the play scene because I think it lends itself well to modern adaptation, especially for students, who are the most likely group to read Mansfield Park. Most people have experienced doing a project which they dreaded, and I hope to use this to make my readers identify with Fanny at least somewhat. I did not follow Austen’s text word for word but rather just used the play scene as my general layout. When I got to six pages I stopped at what I thought was a good point. I have no idea how long the story would have gone on or what exactly would have happened when the group presented their scene. I thought it better to stop while I was ahead.

Mansfield High

 Fanny Price was not one of the popular crowd. She was one of those shy girls who somehow ends up with really popular friends, likely because she was intelligent enough to be useful and timid enough not to protest. Not that the popular crowd who enlisted her as their token shy girl took any notice. If asked they would have said they were doing Fanny Price quite the favor, lifting her above her social status, into the “it” crowd of Mansfield High.

 The “it” crowd consisted of Maria and her boyfriend, the much beloved star of the football team Rushworth, Maria’s best friend Julia, the class clown and popular delinquent Tom, and recently added the twins Henry and Mary, who had just transferred in and quickly found their way into this little group as they were the type of people who ooze charisma. The group also enjoyed the membership of Edmund, the school’s genius, likely to end up at an Ivy League, but he was forgiven for this on account of his good looks and natural charm.

Secretly Edmund was the only one of the group for whom Fanny had any real affection, probably because so far in their high school careers, although they were all “friends”, Edmund was the only one who took any real notice of Fanny. Now Edmund’s notice of Fanny was really due to his general kindness as a human being, but considering how rare such kindness is among high school boys Fanny can hardly be blamed if she had read into this a bit too much and developed feelings which went a little beyond the average weekly crush expected of all high school girls. It is hard not to care for the one person who remembers us in a world that seems determined to forget, and so we must forgive Fanny this fault of caring for someone who unfortunately did not care for her.

Edmund could not care for Fanny as she wished him to, for he was rather too occupied with Mary. Mary had of course set her sights on dating the most popular guy at Mansfield High in order to cement herself at the top of the social hierarchy. Her charms had originally been meant for Tom, but after he was expelled for two weeks due to some prank (the details of which are too vulgar to mention in a respectable story) Mary had grown rather interested in the sincerity and good nature of Edmund. Edmund, being an adolescent boy, was naturally susceptible to the charms of a pretty and witty girl, and thus their flirtation had been advancing for some weeks.

This was the state of affairs when Mr. Bertram assigned their English class a project. It was the one class the group all shared, and so naturally when picking groups they had to be together. Fanny would have rather worked by herself, but unfortunately that was not an option. The assignment was a creative group project, and anyone who has experienced high school will know that for some, especially those with similar personalities to Fanny, this was the most dreaded of all possible assignments. Not only were you forced to work with others, which could produce copious amounts of stress on its own, you were also forced to be creative, which in high school was really just a synonym for artistic and thus was an extremely trying occupation for those who did not possess an aesthetic talent. Fanny would never understand why people under a certain age were predetermined as gold mines of creative thought, but such was the case. Since she did not want to fail English literature (a class she would have enjoyed were it not for the constant prodding to participate in class discussion, which Fanny found rather trying) Fanny simply groaned inwardly as she agreed to join a group with her more popular friends.

Tom, out of his love for attention and performance which generally lays at the heart of all class jokesters, immediately suggested doing a scene from a play. Everyone heartily agreed to this. Everyone that is except Fanny, who found the idea most mortifying, but since Fanny was not very vocal about her opinions the others tended to remain blissfully unaware that Fanny did in fact have opinions. At one point Edmund might have noticed, but he was much too caught up in the delight which Mary was expressing at the proposal to have any time to worry about Fanny.

With this project being selected, it was soon decided (soon meaning with lots of bickering, threats, and general frustration) that the group would attempt a modern retelling of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. There was a reason this was in fact a bad idea. Mr. Bertram loved Shakespeare, but he was a purist. He was the type of English teacher who would eagerly flunk a student caught using a No Fear Shakespeare Edition of any play. To modernize Shakespeare would be in his opinion spitting in the face of everything which makes Shakespeare great. Our group was well aware of Mr. Bertram’s opinions, and so their choice of project could be construed as a bit rebellious.

Fanny and Edmund were well aware of Mr. Bertram’s views, and because they both were of that sect of the high school population who care about their grades they were rather flabbergasted by the boldness of their fellow group members.

Edmund cautioned Tom about the likelihood of a failed grade, but Tom, who would likely be repeating the year anyway due to multiple expulsions waved him off. “Come on Edmund, don’t be a stick in the mud. Just imagine the look on old Bertie’s face. And besides”, here Tom’s face gathered mock seriousness, and he drew Edmund closer “you wouldn’t want to disappoint the girls, they are having such fun with the whole thing… especially Mary.” Tom may have been a delinquent but unfortunately for Edmund he was an observant delinquent. Edmund was no match for such sound reasoning and reluctantly agreed to go forward with the project. It must be admitted that his reluctance faded rather quickly upon listening to Mary’s passionate approval of the scheme. She thought it would serve Mr. Bertram, who in her opinion was really an old uptight bag of hot air (though she may have used more explicit language which Edmund did not dare to repeat), right. Edmund could not completely feel that Mary was correct in her attitude, but when one has such pretty eyes being correct is just an added bonus.

Fanny and her dissenting opinion remained quite unnoticed by the group even as they began assigning parts. She felt herself swept along in the bustle of the preparations, and she continued to trust that she would not have to play a part, which she secretly hoped would prevent Mr. Bertram’s wrath from descending on her.

The assignment of parts when the egos of so many adolescents are at stake can be a trying business. Tom had eagerly claimed the part of Puck which none begrudged him. Henry quickly decided that he would be a fair Lysander, which of course meant that someone would have to play his lover Hermia. Here some issues arose for Maria and Julia both thought they would make an excellent Hermia.

Now if one had been observing the group for some weeks, as Fanny had, one might have observed that there seemed to be some rivalry brewing between the best friends, Maria and Julia. And if one was even more observant, one might have also noticed that this rivalry began around the time Henry transferred into Mansfield High. It was a sad thing to suspect of Maria, who loudly declared her undying love for Rushworth at least once a week, but Fanny had her suspicions nevertheless. These suspicions certainly did not decrease when both Maria and Julia continued to declare that she would make the better Hermia.

One could get into the petty arguments two high school girls, each determined to have their own way, are capable of using, but the author confesses that this prospect bores her and thus she will omit a detailed description and only say that it was eventually determined that Maria, being the smaller of the two, was more suited for the part of Hermia.

 Rushworth wanted the part of Demetrius, but since he was unable to memorize his lines the part fell instead to Edmund. Edmund felt rather worried about his ability to act, but after Mary claimed the role of Helena with a knowing smile in his direction it must be confessed that Edmund was no longer thinking of acting.

 Rushworth was finally given the role of Bottom, whose lines had been drastically reduced in the group’s rewrite in favor of giving more attention to the lovers. This script change had been Henry’s suggestion and if the reader feels inclined to suspect him of some more nefarious purposes in this suggestion the author will not dissuade them. Julia consented to be Titania, but only after being told that she could wear a crown and after cutting all the parts where she would have to be in love with Bottom.

These alterations made the script a bit nonsensical, but no one other than Fanny seemed to care. Fanny still carried the vain hope that they might produce a passing grade, a hope which most of the other had never bothered to entertain and which Edmund had given up in favor of better hopes.

Despite all of these hiccups, Fanny at least felt secured in having escaped the dreaded duty of acting. She enjoyed watching the others act, and she thought Henry a rather good actor in particular but she was quite convinced of her own inability to do likewise. Tom, however, shattered these hopes when he declared that “Fanny of course will fill in any minor roles as needed”. Never has a sentence which so utterly crushed the soul of one person been spoken with so much ease by another!

Fanny for the first time felt that it was absolutely necessary to make her views known. The dread of acting far outweighed the fear of speaking her mind, and hence she said with as much resolution as her unused voice could muster “I would rather be excused from acting. I will of course do whatever else I can to contribute to the group, but I simply cannot act”. Fanny had in fact done quite a lot for the group in gathering costume materials, helping the others with their lines, and patching up the messy script as best she could. She thus felt justified in her assertion against acting, but naturally none of the group remembered these things at the moment.

It is hard to express the astonishment of the others at Fanny’s declaration. It is the astonishment of discovering that someone who you assumed was an extension of your own will has a mind of their own. Fanny was normally so agreeable that most of the group had come to view her in this light, and this voice, which was asserting her independence from their own thoughts, bewildered them.

**To be continued …**