



NELL DASH

by Doug DeVita

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**NELL DASH**  
The Gruesomely Merry Adventures of  
An Irrepressibly Sensible Capitalist With A Vengeance

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by  
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CHARACTER NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	AGE	GENDER
Nell Dash	A cheerful but sensible pie-maker	32	F
Lady Fanny Dashwood	A selfish, evil, upper-crust woman	36	F
<b>Nance /</b>	<b>Nell's younger sister, a prostitute</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>Estella</b>	<b>Adopted child of Miss Havisham</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>F</b>
Celia Peachum /	Polly's ambitious, conniving mother	35	F
Miss Pross /	An elderly customer of Nell's	75	F
Wackford Squeers	A hospital attendant	30	M
<b>Dodger /</b>	<b>A teenage pickpocket</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>M</b>
<b>Edward Ferrars /</b>	<b>Fanny's gentle younger brother</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>M</b>
<b>Mr. Todd /</b>	<b>A socially awkward barber</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>M</b>
<b>Executioner</b>	<b>An executioner</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>M</b>
Fagin /	An old Jewish leader of thieves	60	M
Mr. Brownlow /	The Dashwood family solicitor	60	M
Dr. Grimwig /	A grumpy doctor	60	M
Abel Magwitch	Another elderly thief	60	M
<b>Toby Muzzle (or just Muzzle) /</b>	<b>A dim-witted but gentle footman</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>M</b>
<b>Miss Aurelia Havisham /</b>	<b>A recluse</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>The Beadle /</b>	<b>An unctuous minor official</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>M</b>
<b>King Stanley V8</b>	<b>The King of this alternate England</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>M</b>
Polly Peachum /	A crafty little girl, very pretty	8	F
Bill Sikes /	A notoriously violent thief	35	M
Tiger Brown /	An ambitious but genial policeman	40	M
Mr. Jaggers	The Havisham family solicitor	40	M

**CAST:** 4 Women, 4 Men

The actresses playing Nell and Fanny do not cover any other roles; the rest of the cast play multiple roles as indicated above.

**SYNOPSIS:** In an alternate London of 1820 during the joyous reign of King Stanley V8, Elinor and Marianne Wood, the illegitimate daughters of Sir Henry Dashwood and his cook, have become Nell Dash and Nance. Their vile half-sister-in-law Lady Fanny Ferrars Dashwood stops at nothing to keep them from getting a single penny of the annuity they have inherited, whilst at the same time trying to attain the two strands of pearls given the girls when they fled Devonshire, pearls which have mysteriously disappeared and have a strange history of their own.

## **SCENE BREAKDOWN**

There are many locations throughout the play; the set can be as elaborate or as sparse as the producer and/or director wishes. The only necessities are a table and a couple of chairs. Projections noting time and place between scenes would be helpful.

LONDON, 1820

### **ACT ONE**

1. Lady Dashwood's Drawing Room in Berkeley Square
2. Nell's Pie Shoppe, Fleet Street
3. Fagin's Lair on Saffron Hill
4. Lady Dashwood's Drawing Room
5. Nell's Pie Shop
6. Nell's Pie Shop
7. A Dark Alley
8. Lady Dashwood's Drawing Room
9. In Front of St. Dunstan's In The West
10. Nell's Pie Shop
11. Nell's Pie Shop
12. Nell's Pie Shop
13. A Hospital in Southwark
14. The Thames Embankment

### **ACT TWO**

1. The Thames Embankment
2. Miss Havisham's Mansion, Rochester, Kent
3. Nell's Pie Shop
4. Fagin's Lair on Saffron Hill
5. Nell's Pie Shop
6. The Hospital
7. Mr. Jagger's Office in London
8. Lady Dashwood's Drawing Room
9. Nell's Pie Shop
10. Epilogue: The Courtyard in Newgate Prison, One Year Later

**BOOK ONE, CHAPTER ONE: IN WHICH LADY FANNY DASHWOOD PUTS THINGS IN IRREVOCABLE MOTION.**

A drawing room in Berkeley Square. Fanny is sealing an envelope. She rings for Muzzle, her footman. He enters.

FANNY

You do know where to deliver this, Muzzle?

MUZZLE

Yes, Lady Dashwood. If you please, mum, / your

FANNY

/ Ma'am, Muzzle. How many times must / I

MUZZLE

/ Ma'am, your solicitor has been waiting nearly a quarter of an hour now.

FANNY

Oh, yes. Please send him in as you leave to deliver this most urgent message. Hurry, now, Muzzle. Wait for a reply.

MUZZLE

Yes, mum Ma'am.

FANNY

And do not partake of her gin this time, Muzzle.

MUZZLE

No, Ma'am. (He exits. Off:) If you please, sir, her Ladyship will see you now.

He shows Mr. Brownlow into the room, then exits.

FANNY

Mr. Brownlow, thank you for coming so quickly. You were the first person I contacted after the death of my husband this very morning.

MR. BROWNLOW

May I offer my sincere condolences on the / loss

FANNY

/ Yes, yes, yes, thank you.

MR. BROWNLOW

He was not yet 40, was he? So young, compared to his father, the late Sir Henry.

FANNY

Yes. So sad. You have brought my newly late husband's last will and testament?

MR. BROWNLOW

Yes, yes, yes of course.

FANNY

I am to be left everything, then? The estates, the lands, the jewelry, the Dashwood meat packing business, everything will now be in my name?

MR. BROWNLOW

As you have no male heirs... Well, nearly everything, yes.

FANNY

Nearly?

MR. BROWNLOW

The terms of the late Sir John Dashwood's will, may he rest in peace, are quite clear: in the event he were to die childless, and as his legitimate younger sister Mrs. Margaret Ferrars has predeceased him, also childless, he wished to leave an annuity of two thousand, five hundred pounds per annum to each of his sisters, Elinor and Marianne Wood, as his sole remaining blood relations.

FANNY

Half-relations, Mr. Brownlow, half-relations. Do remember: their name was Wood, and not *Dashwood*.

MR. BROWNLOW

Nonetheless, they are his blood relations.

FANNY

I am quite assured they are dead. Nothing has been heard of them for years.

MR. BROWNLOW

Quite assured is not completely certain, now is it, Lady Dashwood? Every effort must be made to ascertain whether or not Miss Elinor and Miss Marianne Wood are still living.

FANNY

They nearly broke their father's heart when they ran away. They are hardly deserving of an enormous annuity of two thousand five hundred pounds a year. Each!

MR. BROWNLOW

My dear Lady Dashwood, what are 5,000 pounds a year compared to the 60,000 a year you stand to inherit?

FANNY

5,000 less than 65,000, Mr. Brownlow. And those ungrateful girls were given two quite expensive strands of pearls by their half-sister Margaret, may she also rest in peace. Those pearls should stand them in good stead. IF they have not succumbed to disease or drink. The last I heard they had become whores.

MR. BROWNLOW

Nonetheless, these are your newly-late husband's wishes, and as his solicitor, I shall undertake an extensive effort to locate his half-sisters.

FANNY

An impossible task, as I am sure they are dead or irrevocably missing. And if they are still alive, they will then never die.

MR. BROWNLOW

I beg your pardon?

FANNY

People live forever when there is an annuity involved. And if those exquisite pearls have not disappeared with them, they will, by all rights, be returned to me, will they not, as the sole surviving member of the Dashwood family?

MR. BROWNLOW

Unless one or both of them has had a surviving male child, and that child, or children, as it were, be still alive. The terms of Sir John's will are quite clear, and quite incontestable.

FANNY

A surviving male child? Or more?

MR. BROWNLOW

It's very possible, Lady Dashwood. I myself had nearly given up hope I would ever find my beloved niece Emily, and while my hopes were dashed to find she had, indeed, died, how overjoyed was I to discover she had not died before giving birth to my great-nephew, a delightful young man recently restored to me.

FANNY

How wonderful for you, Mr. Brownlow, but not every story has a happy ending. I would hate to be the cause of you wasting your time, which I know is quite a valuable – and expensive – commodity. I am grief-stricken enough by the death of my beloved Sir John.

MR. BROWNLOW

My expenses are not drawn from the principal sums of your accounts, Lady Dashwood, and as for your grief, well... I leave you to it. Good day, Ma'am.

He exits.

FANNY

A surviving male child? Or more? Good heavens, I had not thought of that. Will there be no end to the hell those two illegitimate harlots are to put me through?

**CHAPTER TWO: IN WHICH NELL VOWS HER VENGEANCE, AND MUZZLE PARTAKES OF HER GIN.**

Nell's Pie Shop in Fleet Street. Later that morning. Nell, stirring dough with a big wooden spoon. Muzzle enters.

MUZZLE

If you please, Ma'am, a note for you. Oops. The wax broke.

NELL

I see. What's she want now, eh, Muzzle?

MUZZLE

I'm quite sure I can't say, Ma'am.

NELL

Oh, I'm quite sure you can, Muzzle.

MUZZLE

Your brother, Sir John Dashwood, has passed away this morning.

NELL

Half-brother, Muzzle. I guess I must go pay my respects to his widow.

MUZZLE

She don't want you comin' round, Ma'am. And she's taking the opportunity, now she figures she's running things, to cut your meat supplies and charge you for 'em.

NELL

And they say you can't read well.

MUZZLE

That's what they say, Ma'am.



NELL

My own father's meat business she's using against me now? I must say I saw this coming.

MUZZLE

I'm to wait for a reply, Ma'am.

NELL

(Quickly scanning the note.) Yes. No. No. And GOD no. Have you got that?

MUZZLE

Yes, Ma'am. Yes. No. No. And GOD no. She won't like that.

NELL

(Pouring him some gin.) Here, she won't like this either.

MUZZLE

Thank you, Ma'am. She's not a very nice woman, is she?

NELL

You shouldn't be talking about your employer that way, Toby Muzzle, you know that. But... Yes, she is a hard one, ain't she?

MUZZLE

I'm so afraid now, what with both the Mr. Dashwoods gone, she's going to sack me. I'm not really a very good footman, you know, but Mr. Dashwood, the elder, kept me on after my mother, the housekeeper, passed. He was a kind man, wasn't he?

NELL

Yes, he was. My father was a very kind, loving man, with a heart big enough for all God's creatures. I wish I could take you on here, Toby, but times is hard. (Gives him a pie.) You can always count on me for tot of gin and a pie or two, so you'll never go hungry, at least.

MUZZLE

You're a good Christian woman, Nell Dash, that you are. You and your sister were such sweet affable little things, I always had a soft spot for the two of you, and your mum, too. (He takes a bite of a pie and makes a face.) She was a good cook, your mum. You remember her secret? Stir for an hour, with a big wooden spoon. Makes the dough nice and smooth.

NELL

Mum never had to bake 12 dozen pies at a time.

MUZZLE

She used to let me lick that big wooden spoon. Then she'd hit me with it. I liked her.

NELL

We were all almost like family below stairs there in Devonshire, now weren't we?

MUZZLE

Yes, Ma'am.

NELL

Now off with you. And remember, you don't know who I really am. Fanny would sack you quicker'n a greased pig at the Devonshire fair if you ever let it slip.

MUZZLE

I'll remember, Ma'am. (He goes, muttering to himself.) Yes. No. No. And GOD no. Yes. No. No. And GOD no. Yes. No. No. And GOD no.

Nell goes back to stirring her dough, a little less cheerfully.

NELL

I must now go tell my sister there are but three blood-related Dashwoods left in this world. (She pours a gin and re-reads the note. She speaks in a more refined accent now.) Fanny Dashwood, you are a piece, aren't you? You can keep my sister Marianne and me from paying respects to our departed half-brother. You can make my beloved Edward, your brother, marry my half-sister Margaret instead of marrying me like he wanted. You can force me to change my name from Wood to Dash. And with my half-brother John now gone, you can even try to charge me for the rotten bits of beef you will "condescend" to sell me from my own late father's business. But as God is my witness, Lady Fanny Ferrars Dashwood, you will never, ever, ever get your greedy little hands on my string of pearls, the only worldly reminder of my past life of quiet half-gentility. But first I must get them back myself.

**CHAPTER THREE: IN WHICH PLEASANT CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN FAGIN, CELIA PEACHUM, AND THE ARTFUL DODGER HAVE FAR REACHING CONSEQUENCES.**

Fagin's lair on Saffron Hill. Shortly after. Fagin, Celia Peachum, and her pretty little daughter, Polly.

FAGIN

Equal partners, eh?

CELIA

Equal partners, Fagin. I've been pimpin' your girls and motherin' your brats for fifteen years. It's me due.

FAGIN

Celia Peachum, dear lady! Time's bein' so hard, the law breathin' down our necks, and you want to take the bread out of our mouths?

CELIA

What about the bread for me own little Polly over there, what's soon to grow into a fine young lady, worth somethin' to us?

FAGIN

I don't doubt she'll make us both a small fortune, me dear, yes, a small fortune.

CELIA

That she will. But listen, you old skinflint: 50% now, or you ain't gettin' me Polly later.

DODGER

(Popping in from a hidden entrance.) Fagin! I got your news!

FAGIN

Not now, Dodger me dear. We're conducting a little business.

DODGER

Right you are.

Dodger lurks in the shadows. Polly stares at him lovingly.

CELIA

You heard me, Fagin. You know what I want. Think it over carefully. Very, very carefully.

FAGIN

I'd hate to think it's come to threats after all I've done for you since you were but your little Polly's age. Always been one of my favorites, you have.

CELIA

And after all I've done for you, too. C'mon, Polly, we're goin'. POLLY! Stop your moonin' afore I cuff you one!

Celia grabs Polly and exits, then motions for Polly to sneak back in. She hides in a corner, watching.

DODGER

She's your favorite?

FAGIN

You're all me favorites, Dodge, you're all me favorites. So? The news?

DODGER

Me half-crown?

FAGIN

You'd take the bread out of our mouths?

DODGER

That's a laugh. C'mon, Fagin, me half-crown.

FAGIN

Turn around.

He does. Fagin goes to a dark corner, takes out a chest and removes a coin. He puts the chest back, slaps Dodger's butt, and hands him the coin.

DODGER

The kid is with the old gentleman.

FAGIN

The one you pinched the tenner from?

DODGER

He's his grand-dad, or uncle, or something like that.

FAGIN

This is bad, Dodge, this is bad. If he peaches, it's the drop for all of us then, me dear.

DODGER

For you maybe, Fagin, but not for me. They don't call me the Artful Dodger for nothing.

FAGIN

Now, Dodger, me boy, how can you talk to your old Fagin like that? Ain't I took care of you like you was me own from almost the cradle to now, ever since you were dropped on me doorstep? Always given you the least moldy sausages?

DODGER

Not for less than a sovereign.

FAGIN

A POUND, DODGE!?! I ain't even asked you yet!

DODGER

But I can always tell when you need me for something big. A sovereign. Or nothin'.

Dodger holds out his hand. They repeat the business.

FAGIN

Find out how we can get the kid back from the old gentleman.

DODGER

See you tomorrow.

Making sure he's gone, Fagin takes out the chest, pulling out piece after piece of jewelry, ending with two necklaces – two lovely strings of pearls. He studies the clasps.

FAGIN

Ah. "M." And "E." ME! Me beauties. Me fortune. Me security. Me legacy.

Polly sneaks back out.

CELIA

Well? Did you see where he hides his stash?

POLLY

Yes.

CELIA

And?

POLLY

I want a string of pearls, mummy.

**CHAPTER FOUR: IN WHICH THE GRIEVING FANNY INVITES HER BROTHER EDWARD TO PARTAKE OF HER SPECIAL BLEND OF TEA.**

Fanny's drawing room. A week later. Fanny and her brother Edward Ferrars.

EDWARD

Dearest sister Fanny, I came as soon as I heard about my poor unfortunate brother-in-law.

FANNY

We are all we have now, Edward. Tea?

EDWARD

No, thank you. I did not know that John also suffered from acute stomach problems.

FANNY

Yes, apparently the Dashwoods are not a hearty lot. My poor dear father-in-law, Sir Henry Dashwood, your poor, sweet wife, Margaret, and now my beloved husband, Sir John. All... Gone. Leaving us only their fortunes, and yours.

EDWARD

Yes, dear sister. Unless we each remarry and have sons, we are each other's heirs.

FANNY

Where is that useless Muzzle? I've ordered a lovely tea for you.

EDWARD

No, thank you, Fanny.

FANNY

But Edward, it's the special blend you like from Fortnum & Mason. I ordered it especially when I received your letter telling me you were coming. Dear Brother.

EDWARD

Dear Sister. Thank you, but no.

FANNY

But I insist. You've traveled so far; that journey all the way from Plymouth / must

EDWARD

/ Bath.

FANNY

I beg your pardon?

EDWARD

I live in Bath now, Fanny.

FANNY

How extraordinary. Well. Your journey all the way from Bath must have been exhausting. (She pulls the servant's cord, and calls out in a hearty, guttural bleat) MUZZLE!!!

(Back to her more “refined” voice.) Honestly, Edward, my late father-in-law was a lovely, generous man, but he was entirely too kind when it came to retaining his family retainers.

EDWARD

He was loyal to the people who served him, Fanny. I don’t see what is so wrong with that.

FANNY

At least my late husband’s half-sisters had the good sense to leave after their mother, the cook, passed away. Imagine how awful it would have been for the poor girls to continue living in a house where they had no real social standing?

EDWARD

What of the Misses Wood? Our half-sisters-in-law? Marianne, and... and... Elinor?

FANNY

Dearest Edward, your late brother-in-law spent much of his time and our resources trying to find the dear girls, but they disappeared so quickly after their mother died and you married Margaret, leaving not a trace. I very much fear they are dead.

EDWARD

Oh, dear.

FANNY

You need tea.

EDWARD

No, Fanny, I’ll be fine. It’s just... I had always hoped...

FANNY

(A louder bark) **MUZZLE!!!**

He instantly enters with the tea.

MUZZLE

Is there anything else you require, mum?

FANNY

Ma’am.

MUZZLE

Ma’am?

She dismisses Muzzle, and begins preparing the tea.