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Cast of Characters

MR. BENNET

MRS. BENNET

ELIZABETH BENNET

JANE BENNET

MARY BENNET / CHARLOTTE LUCAS

KITTY BENNET

LYDIA BENNET / GEORGIANA

MR. DARCY

MR. BINGLEY / COLONEL FITZWILLIAM / SERVANT

SIR WILLIAM LUCAS / MR. COLLINS / MR. GARDINER

MISS BINGLEY / MRS. GARDINER

BALL GUEST / GEORGE WICKHAM

BALL GUEST / LADY CATHERINE DE BOURGH /
HOUSEKEEPER

BALL GUEST / OFFICER / SERVANT

Setting

In and around Hertfordshire, England, 1813

Production Note

This play is performed in two acts. Act One runs one hour and fifteen minutes and Act Two fifty minutes.

Director's Note

Pride and Prejudice is played basically on a bare stage on which the scenes are changed by rearrangements of furniture done in sight by the acting company. The back wall, representing sky, has six openings with sliding doors, three at stage level and three on a second level. If simpler is better the second level could be eliminated.

The Bennets' home, Longbourn, is so often returned to, that for variety I found it useful visually to keep the same furniture arrangement but angle it different ways from scene to scene.

The furniture I found useful included ten chairs, a chaise, a piano-forte, a writing desk, a park bench and two stools, but this depends on the director's needs for staging.

The cast includes fourteen actors but could be reduced by one if an extra male dancer is not deemed necessary for the ball scenes. In most cases each character had one costume to which pieces were added from time to time. The play moves so swiftly that there is little time to change.

The "pull-toys" mentioned in the script were a carriage in silhouette pulled by two horses, a small version of Darcy's home at Pemberley (the windows lit up, it was wonderful) and the silhouettes of dancers for the ball scene. These varied in size from three feet tall down to eighteen inches, had wheels and were pulled across the stage by cast members.

I have included an indication of furniture placement for some scenes, but by all means disdain them and create your own.

I recommend the wonderful music score by Peter Ekstrom.

Contact Playscripts, Inc. for more information about the original score, as well as the original stage diagrams charting scene changes and furniture placement.

Sincerely,
Jon Jory

Acknowledgments

Pride and Prejudice had its World Premiere in a co-production between:

Arizona Theatre Company

Tucson and Phoenix, Arizona (Sept. 10–Nov. 6, 2005)

David Ira Goldstein, Artistic Director

Jessica L. Andrews, Managing Director

San Jose Repertory Theatre

San Jose, California (Nov. 26–Dec. 30, 2005)

Timothy Near, Artistic Director

David Jobin, Managing Director

Alliance Theatre

Atlanta, Georgia (Jan. 11–Feb. 12, 2006)

Susan V. Booth, Artistic Director

Thomas Pechar, Managing Director

The cast and staff were as follows:

Mr. Bennet David Pichette
Lydia Bennet / Georgiana Jennifer Erdmann
Elizabeth Bennet Julia Dion
Mary Bennet / Charlotte Lucas Sarah Roberts
Jane Bennet Krista Hoepfner
Kitty Bennet Adele Bruni
Mrs. Bennet Peggy Price
Mr. Bingley / Fitzwilliam Liam Vincent
Mr. Darcy Anthony Marble
Mr. Lucas / Gardiner / Collins Remi Sandri
Miss Bingley / Mrs. Gardiner Amy Resnick
Lt. Wickham Joe Knezevich
Lady Catherine de Bourgh /
Housekeeper Pat Nesbit
Dancer / Officer /
Manservant Douglas B. Giorgis

Scenic Designer..... Robert A. Dahlstrom
 Costume Designer..... Michael Krass
 Lighting Designer..... Michael Philippi
 Composer Peter Ekstrom
 Sound Designer Stephen LeGrand
 Choreographer..... Daniel Pelzig
 Assistant Director Tamara Fisch
 Dialect Coach Diane J. Winslow
 Production Stage Manager..... Glenn Bruner
 Stage Manager Bruno Ingram
 Assistant Stage Manager John Kingsbury
 Assistant to the Stage Manager Stacey Flores

 Arizona casting.....ATC Artistic Staff
 New York casting..... Laura Richin
 San Jose casting..... Bruce Elsperger
 Atlanta casting..... Jody Feldman

All production groups performing this play are required to include the following credits on the title page of every program:

Pride and Prejudice had its World Premiere in a co-production between Arizona Theatre Company (David Ira Goldstein, Artistic Director / Jessica L. Andrews, Managing Director), San Jose Repertory Theatre (Timothy Near, Artistic Director / David Jobin, Managing Director), and Alliance Theatre (Susan V. Booth, Artistic Director / Thomas Pechar, Managing Director).

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

by Jane Austen

adapted by Jon Jory

ACT I

(At the back of the stage a sky with clouds. In the sky six doors, three each on two levels. These open to reveal characters and the lower three serve as entrances. Furniture of the period (1813) is moved in and out as needed. When the play begins only Mr. Bennet's armchair is center. As the lights come up MR. BENNET and his five daughters enter carrying four more chairs which are set about the stage. MR. BENNET is seated center, his daughters around him enjoying various homely pursuits. The tableau animates.)

MR. BENNET. You are very punctual to your time I see. Very glad indeed. Delighted to have the pleasure of receiving you here at Longbourn. The Bennets of Longbourn, eh? Pray allow me to make you acquainted with my daughters. Come along Jane. Miss Jane Bennet.

LYDIA. The eldest. Though I cannot see why she must always have the chair nearest the window.

ELIZABETH. Hush Lydia.

MARY. *(Glancing at JANE.)* And the prettiest of all.

JANE. Mary, for goodness sake.

MR. BENNET. The next, Elizabeth.

MARY. Wittiest of all.

LYDIA. Though Captain Talley of the regiment expressed her to be the most critical young lady in Hertfordshire.

ELIZABETH. In the only complete sentence I ever heard him construct.

LYDIA. La.

MR. BENNET. And book in hand, as always, Mary.

KITTY. The proudest.

MARY. *(Without skipping a beat:)* Pride is a very common failing, I believe. By all that I have ever read, I am convinced that it is very common indeed, and that there are very few of us who do not cherish a feeling of self-complacency on the score of some quality or other, real or imaginary.

MR. BENNET. And last, but—

MARY. Vanity and pride are different things, though the words are often used synonymously. A person may be proud without being vain.

MR. BENNET. I—

MARY. Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves; vanity to what we would have others think of us.

(Curtseys and returns to her chair to read.)

MR. BENNET. *(Nonplussed:)* Well. Yes. Quite so. And the two youngest, of course, Kitty and Lydia.

KITTY. Are we to be only “the youngest,” have we no qualities?

LYDIA. We are the best dancers with the prettiest hats.

KITTY. And sing most charmingly...well, I do.

MRS. BENNET. *(Entering in a fluster:)* My dear Mr. Bennet...

MR. BENNET. *(To audience:)* Mrs. Bennet, to be sure.

(She pays no attention but knows the matter at hand and our story is begun.)

MRS. BENNET. My dear Mr. Bennet, have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?

MR. BENNET. I have not.

MRS. BENNET. But it is, for Mrs. Long has just been there and she told me all about it.

LYDIA. Probably an elderly bachelor with a King Charles spaniel.

MRS. BENNET. Indeed Mr. Bennet, do not you want to know who has taken it?

MR. BENNET. You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it.

MRS. BENNET. Mrs. Long says that Netherfield is taken by a young man of large fortune...

KITTY. Really?

MRS. BENNET. That he came down on Monday and was so delighted with it that he is to take possession before Michaelmas.

LYDIA. Married or single?

MR. BENNET. We might first enquire of the gentleman's name, Lydia.

MRS. BENNET. Bingley.

(BINGLEY is revealed on second level.)

KITTY. But, married or single?

MRS. BENNET. Oh, single, my dears, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year!

MARY, KITTY, LYDIA. *(To the audience:)* It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

(They turn back up as ELIZABETH comes down. The BINGLEY reveal ends.)

ELIZABETH. *(To the audience:)* However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families...

(Now speaks to JANE:)

That he is considered the rightful property of some one or others of their daughters.

JANE. *(Smiling:)* Oh dear.

MRS. BENNET. Hush, Lizzy. What a fine thing for our girls.

MR. BENNET. How so?

KITTY. That he might marry one of us, Papa.

MR. BENNET. And is that his design in settling here?

MRS. BENNET. Design? Nonsense. But it is not unusual that a young man may fall in love.

LYDIA. Though he must be a soldier in a red regimental jacket.

MRS. BENNET. You must visit him as soon as he comes.

MR. BENNET. I see no occasion for that. You and the girls may go, or send them by themselves, which perhaps will be still better, for as you are as handsome as any of them, Mr. Bingley might like you the best of the party!

MRS. BENNET. Well, I certainly have my share of beauty but when a woman has five grown up daughters she ought to give over ideas of her own attractions.

MR. BENNET. In such cases, a woman has not often much beauty to think of.

MRS. BENNET. But consider your daughters, think what an establishment it would be for one of them. You must go, for it will be impossible for us to visit him, if you do not.

MR. BENNET. You are over scrupulous surely. I will send a few lines by you to assure him of my hearty consent to his marrying whichever he chooses.

MRS. BENNET. Mr. Bennet, you take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion on my poor nerves.

MR. BENNET. My dear, I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends.

MRS. BENNET. Ah, you do not know what I suffer.

MR. BENNET. But I hope you will get over it, and live to see many young men of four thousand a year come into the neighbourhood.

MRS. BENNET. It will be of no use to us, if twenty such should come, since you will not visit them.

MR. BENNET. Depend upon it, my dear, when there are twenty, I will visit them all.

JANE. *(To audience:)* Despite his protestations, Papa was among the earliest of those who waited on Mr. Bingley.

(LYDIA is trimming a hat.)

MR. BENNET. Capital Lydia, I hope Mr. Bingley will like it.

MRS. BENNET. We are not in a way to know what Mr. Bingley likes, since we are not to visit.

KITTY. It isn't fair Papa, really it isn't.

ELIZABETH. You forget that we shall meet him at the assemblies, and that Mrs. Long has promised to introduce him.

MRS. BENNET. I do not believe Mrs. Long will do any such thing. She has two nieces of her own.

LYDIA. And plain as cake, both of them.

MRS. BENNET. She is a selfish, hypocritical woman, and I have no opinion of her.

MR. BENNET. Indeed, but let us return to Mr. Bingley.

MRS. BENNET. And I say I am sick of Mr. Bingley!

MR. BENNET. My dear, why did you not tell me so before? If I had known as much this morning I certainly would not have called on him.

MRS. BENNET. Called on him. Called on him!?

LYDIA. Oh Papa!

KITTY. Truly Father?

MRS. BENNET. Now see what an excellent father you have girls. But I knew I should persuade you at last.

(Shift begins into First Ball.)

MR. BENNET. Yes, I fear that as I have actually paid the visit we cannot escape his acquaintance now.

(The ball begins. ELIZABETH sits to one side. DARCY and BINGLEY stand on the other.)

BINGLEY. *(As they watch the dancers. He has just danced with JANE.)* Come, Darcy, I hate to see you standing about by yourself in this stupid manner. You had much better dance.

DARCY. You know how I detest it unless I am particularly acquainted with my partner. Your sister is engaged, and there is not another woman in the room whom it would not be a punishment to me to stand up with.

BINGLEY. I would not be so fastidious as you are for a kingdom! I never met with so many pleasant girls in my life and several uncommonly pretty.

DARCY. Your partner, the eldest Miss Bennet is the only handsome girl in the room.

BINGLEY. Indeed the most beautiful creature I ever beheld! But there is one of her sisters...

(ELIZABETH has risen and is talking to a young man.)

BINGLEY. Just there, whom I dare say is very agreeable. Allow me to ask my partner to introduce you.

DARCY. She is tolerable, but that is insufficient to tempt me. Pray return to Miss Bennet, you are wasting your time with me.

(The ball begins. BINGLEY dances with JANE.)

MRS. BENNET. Oh my dear Mr. Bennet, we have a most excellent ball. Jane is so admired and Mr. Bingley danced with her *twice*. Then the third he turned to Miss King, the fourth with Maria Lucas, the fifth with Jane again, the sixth with ...

MR. BENNET. If he had any compassion for me, he would not have danced half so much.

(The scene between MR. and MRS. BENNET is now interspersed with JANE and ELIZABETH talking elsewhere in the room.)

JANE. He is just what a young man ought to be, sensible, good humoured, lively; and I never saw such happy manners! So much ease, with such perfect good breeding.

ELIZABETH. He is also handsome which a young man should be if he possibly can.

MRS. BENNET. I can hardly explain to you the shocking rudeness of Mr. Darcy.

MR. BENNET. Then how wise not to try, my love.

JANE. I was very much flattered by his asking me to dance a second time. I did not expect such a compliment.

ELIZABETH. Did not you? Compliments always take you by surprise and me never.

MRS. BENNET. I can assure you that Lizzy loses nothing by not suiting that Mr. Darcy's fancy; for he is a disagreeable horrid man.

MR. BENNET. But tall my dear, tolerably tall.

ELIZABETH. You are a great deal too apt to like people in general. You never see a fault in anybody. I swear, Jane, that I never heard you speak ill of a human being in my life.

JANE. I would not wish to be hasty in censuring anyone.

MRS. BENNET. Your Mr. Darcy is so high and conceited that there is no enduring him. Lizzy not handsome enough to dance with. Oh, I quite detest the man.

JANE. I always speak what I think.

ELIZABETH. With your good sense, to be so honestly blind to the follies and nonsense of others.

(BINGLEY approaches.)

BINGLEY. *(To JANE:)* Miss Bennet, might you consider a stroll about the room?

(She takes his arm and they move off. Shift begins into Second Ball, at the home of Sir William Lucas. LYDIA steps down to speak to the audience.)

LYDIA. Within a short walk of Longbourn lived a family with whom we were particularly intimate.

MRS. BENNET. *(To the audience:)* Sir William Lucas, formerly in trade in Meryton, had made a tolerable fortune and risen to the honour of knighthood.

KITTY. ...and gives two balls a season.

MRS. BENNET. Lady Lucas was a very good woman and not too clever which I find restful.

ELIZABETH. And their daughter Charlotte...

(She appears.)

Is my particular friend.

LYDIA. Truly, an assembly ball is a paradise to me!

CHARLOTTE. *(To ELIZABETH. The ball begins behind them.)* Occupied as you are in observing Mr. Bingley's attentions to your sister, I think you do not suspect that you yourself have become, shall I say, an object of interest.

ELIZABETH. Indeed? Where?

MR. LUCAS. Welcome ladies and gentlemen all to my hearth and home. What more charming amusement for young people than the dance, eh? I consider it one of the first refinements of polished societies.

DARCY. Any savage can dance sir.

MR. LUCAS. Wit, sir. Wit indeed.

(MR. DARCY moves to where he can observe ELIZABETH talking to CHARLOTTE.)

CHARLOTTE. *(To ELIZABETH:)* Do you not notice that Mr. Darcy seems always on the fringes of your conversation?

ELIZABETH. Mrs. Long told me last night that he sat close to her for half an hour without once opening his lips.

JANE. *(Who has joined them:)* Miss Bingley told me that he never speaks much unless among his intimate acquaintances.

(LYDIA dances by.)

LYDIA. You waste the ball in idle chatter.

CHARLOTTE. *(Seeing DARCY's look:)* Note him.

ELIZABETH. He has an extremely critical eye, and if I do not begin by being impertinent myself, I shall soon grow afraid of him.

(Turning to DARCY:)

ELIZABETH. Did you not think Mr. Darcy, that I expressed myself uncommonly well just now when I was teasing Colonel Forster to give us a ball at Meryton?

DARCY. With great energy; but it is a subject which always makes a lady energetic.

SIR WILLIAM LUCAS. *(Coming up to them:)* My dear Eliza, why are you not dancing? Mr. Darcy, you cannot refuse to dance I am sure when such beauty is before you?

ELIZABETH. Indeed sir, I have not the least intention of dancing. I entreat you not to suppose I moved this way in order to beg for a partner.

DARCY. *(With grave propriety:)* Might I have the honour of your hand for the next, Miss Bennet?

ELIZABETH. Mr. Darcy is all politeness but I must deny myself the pleasure.

(The ball begins. She moves to talk to one of her sisters. DARCY looks after her. MISS BINGLEY moves to him as he regards the dancers.)

DARCY. Miss Bingley.

MISS BINGLEY. Mr. Darcy. I can guess the subject of your reverie.

DARCY. I should imagine not.

MISS BINGLEY. You are considering how insupportable it would be to pass many evenings in such society; and indeed I am quite of your opinion.

LYDIA. (*Dancing by:*) La, I once wore a gown with twelve ribbons and a double rosette.

MISS BINGLEY. The insipidity, the noise, the nothingness and yet the self-importance of all these people! What I would give to hear your strictures on them.

DARCY. Your conjecture is totally wrong, I assure you.

MISS BINGLEY. Oh?

DARCY. I have been meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow.

MISS BINGLEY. Truly? Pray tell me what lady has the credit of inspiring such reflections?

DARCY. Miss Elizabeth Bennet.

MISS BINGLEY. I confess I am all astonishment. How long has she been such a favourite? And pray when am I to wish you joy?

DARCY. I expected as much. A lady's imagination is very rapid; it jumps from admiration to love to matrimony, in a moment.

MISS BINGLEY. Nay, I shall consider the matter as absolutely settled.

(A burst of braying laughter from MRS. BENNET who is talking to SIR WILLIAM LUCAS.)

MRS. BENNET. Indeed you are a scamp and a rogue Sir William.

(More laughter.)

You will make me laugh.

(And does.)

MISS BINGLEY. You will have a charming mother-in-law, indeed.....

(MRS. BENNET laughs.)

and you will have the pleasure of her always being at Pemberley with you.

MRS. BENNET. Mr. Bennet, you must hear what this mischievous fellow is saying.

(MISS BINGLEY moves away. On another part of the dance floor BINGLEY approaches JANE.)

BINGLEY. Miss Bennet, pray forgive even the appearance of unwanted attention, but might I request this reel?

JANE. Indeed sir, it is rather an honour than a request.

BINGLEY. The honour I believe to be mine.

(The reel begins. They dance away. ELIZABETH and CHARLOTTE are talking.)

CHARLOTTE. It seems that Jane quite admires Mr. Bingley.

ELIZABETH. Noticeably, I would agree.

CHARLOTTE. Bingley likes your sister undoubtedly; but he may never do more than like her, if she does not help him on.

ELIZABETH. But she does help him on, as much as her nature will allow.

CHARLOTTE. Remember, Eliza, that he does not know Jane's disposition as you do. Though they meet tolerably often, it is never for many hours together. Jane should therefore make the most of every moment she can command his attention.

ELIZABETH. Your plan is a good one, where nothing is in question but the determination to get a rich husband. These are not Jane's feelings and she has no such design. She takes time, I think to study his character.

CHARLOTTE. Well, I wish her success with all my heart; and if she married him tomorrow, I should think she had as good a chance of happiness as if she had studied his character for a twelve month. It is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life.

ELIZABETH. You make me laugh, Charlotte; but it is not sound and you know, full well, you would never act in such a way yourself.

CHARLOTTE. You are being watched.

(ELIZABETH turns just in time to see DARCY turning away. Shift begins, returning us to Longbourn. ELIZABETH steps forward.)

ELIZABETH. Soon enough, at Longbourn, Jane found herself in receipt of an invitation from...

JANE. *(Reading:)* “My dear friend, if you are not so compassionate as to dine today with me...”

(MISS BINGLEY appears behind her on the second level.)

MISS BINGLEY. ...we shall be in danger of hating each other for the rest of our lives. Come as soon as you can on receipt of this. We shall dine with my brother...

MISS BINGLEY, JANE. ...as well as other gentlemen...

MISS BINGLEY. ...and sundry officers...

JANE. “Yours ever...”

MISS BINGLEY, JANE. ...Caroline Bingley.”

(MISS BINGLEY’s reveal ends.)

LYDIA. *(Immediately on the scent:)* With the officers! May Kitty and I go as well, Mamma?

KITTY. We should like to meet sundry officers.

MR. BENNET. Am I mistaken that there was but one name on the invitation?

JANE. May I have the carriage, Father?

MR. BENNET. Of course.

MRS. BENNET. Indeed not. It would be much better, Jane, to go on horseback for the weather looks ill and you might have the good fortune to be thoroughly soaked and stay longer with the Bingleys in ill health.

(A chaise appears and JANE lies on it. She is at Netherfield.)

ELIZABETH. *(To audience:)* Mamma's hopes were answered. Jane had not been gone long when it rained torrents.

(Sound of thunder.)

MRS. BENNET. That was a lucky idea of mine indeed.

KITTY. *(Bringing a letter to ELIZABETH:)* For you Liz; news from Netherfield I think.

(As ELIZABETH reads, JANE says the letter.)

ELIZABETH. My dearest Lizzy...

JANE. ...I find myself very unwell this morning, which I suppose is to be imputed to my getting wet through yesterday. The Bingleys will not hear of my returning home till I am better...

ELIZABETH. *(Picking up the thread:)* "...though excepting a sore throat and headache, there is not much the matter with me. Yours, Jane."

MR. BENNET. Well my dear, if your daughter should have a dangerous fit of illness and die, it would be a comfort to know that it was all in pursuit of Mr. Bingley and under your orders.

MRS. BENNET. Nonsense, people do not die of little trifling colds, and the inconvenience, Mr. Bennet, is worth the prize.

ELIZABETH. She feels ill and I will go to her.

MR. BENNET. Is this a hint to me Lizzy to send for the horses?

ELIZABETH. The horses are wanted on the farm, I will walk. The distance is nothing when one has a motive; only 3 miles.

MRS. BENNET. You cannot go jumping over stiles and arrive with dirty stockings.

ELIZABETH. Jane, at least, will forgive me Mother.

(She turns out of the scene and meets BINGLEY. She is now at Netherfield.)

MRS. BENNET. Mr. Bennet...

(Shift begins out of Longbourn.)

BINGLEY. Miss Elizabeth, how remarkably good of you to come.

ELIZABETH. A pleasure, of course, Mr. Bingley. You can imagine that my sister's letter gave me some cause for concern.

BINGLEY. Of course. I wish I could answer that concern more favourably. Miss Bennet has slept ill and though up is not well enough to leave her room. I will take you to her.

(They move to JANE lying on the chaise.)

JANE. Lizzy!

ELIZABETH. Jane, you are flushed. Should not you be in bed?

BINGLEY. We have sent for the apothecary. I would be most grateful, Miss Elizabeth, if you would remain at Netherfield until your sister is quite well.

JANE. Yes, do stay.

BINGLEY. I will dispatch a servant to acquaint your family and return with any necessities.

JANE. Mr. Bingley, I cannot attempt to thank you.

BINGLEY. Any thanks are far beyond the occasion, Miss Bennet.

(Takes her hand.)

Believe me, I have no pleasure in the world superior to that of contributing to yours.

(He exits.)

ELIZABETH. *(Looking after him with a smile:)* Well...

(Shift begins into Netherfield drawing room, which appears on the other side of the stage during the following scene. MISS BINGLEY, BINGLEY and DARCY take their seats at a table with four chairs. A piano-forte stands at one side.)

JANE. He is most attentive.

ELIZABETH. Indeed he is. You look quite drawn Jane, but I might say it serves you exactly for falling in with mother's advice.

JANE. Lizzy, how did you get here?

ELIZABETH. The carriage horses were commandeered for the fields so I walked.

JANE. Through the mud?

ELIZABETH. Through the mud, yes.

(The chaise, with JANE on it, exits.)

MISS BINGLEY. To walk three miles, or four miles, or five miles or whatever it is, above her ankles in mud and alone, quite alone, what could she mean by it? It seems to me to show an abominable sort of conceited independence and complete indifference to decorum.

BINGLEY. It shows an affection for her sister that is very pleasing.

MISS BINGLEY. I have an excessive regard for Jane Bennet, and I wish she were well settled. But with such a father and mother, and such low connections, I am afraid there is no chance of it. Their uncle is an attorney in Meryton and another lives somewhere near Cheapside.

BINGLEY. If they had uncles enough to fill all Cheapside, it would not make them one jot less agreeable.

(ELIZABETH enters with a book.)

BINGLEY. Ah Miss Elizabeth a pleasure. Your sister improves I hope?

ELIZABETH. She is resting, but hopes not to be thought unsociable.

BINGLEY. Indeed not.

(She smiles and sits away from the group.)

BINGLEY. I find it singular and intriguing that you prefer reading to cards Miss Bennet.

MISS BINGLEY. Miss Elizabeth Bennet despises cards. She is a great reader with little pleasure in anything else.

ELIZABETH. I deserve neither such praise nor such censure. I am *not* a great reader, and I have pleasure in many things.

MISS BINGLEY. In nursing your sister you have pleasure I am sure.

BINGLEY. Hear, hear!

MISS BINGLEY. (*To DARCY:*) Is Miss Darcy much grown since the spring?

(He nods.)

MISS BINGLEY. How I long to see your charming sister again, such manners and so accomplished for her age.

BINGLEY. It is amazing to me how young ladies can have patience to be so very accomplished as they all are.

MISS BINGLEY. All? My dear Charles what do you mean?

BINGLEY. Yes, Caroline, all. I have never heard a young lady spoken of for the first time without being informed that she was very accomplished.

DARCY. I fear I cannot boast of knowing more than a half dozen in the whole range of my acquaintance that are really accomplished.

ELIZABETH. Then you must comprehend a great deal in your idea of an accomplished woman.

MISS BINGLEY. She must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, languages and a certain something in her air and manner, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions or the word will be but half deserved.

DARCY. And to all this she must yet add something more substantial in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading.

ELIZABETH. I am no longer surprised at your knowing only six accomplished women. I rather wonder now at your knowing any.

BINGLEY. (*Changing the conversation:*) I say, sister, would you perhaps take to the pianoforte and favour us with a lively Scotch air?

DARCY. Splendid. And perhaps Miss Bennet will then seize the opportunity to show us a “fling.”

(No answer from ELIZABETH.)

DARCY. Simple seeming, but difficult in the execution.

(MISS BINGLEY begins to play the piano-forte.)

DARCY. Will you essay Miss Bennet?

ELIZABETH. Oh, I heard you before. You wanted me, I know, to say “yes” that you might have the pleasure of despising my taste, but I always delight in cheating a person of their premeditated contempt. I have therefore made up my mind to tell you I do not want to dance a reel at all: and now despise me if you dare.

BINGLEY. (*Taken aback he laughs and then stops.*) Oh, very sorry Darcy.

ELIZABETH. And is Mr. Darcy not to be laughed at?

DARCY. The wisest and best of men may be rendered ridiculous by a person whose first object in life is a joke.

ELIZABETH. Certainly there are such people, but I hope I am not one of them. I hope I never ridicule what is wise and good. Follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies, *do* divert me, I own, and I laugh at them whenever I can. But these, I suppose, are precisely what you are without.

DARCY. Perhaps that is not possible for anyone. But it has been the study of my life to avoid those weaknesses which often expose a strong understanding to ridicule.

ELIZABETH. Such as vanity and pride?

DARCY. Yes, vanity is a weakness indeed. But pride— where there is a real superiority of mind—pride will be always under good regulation. I have faults enough but they are not, I hope, of understanding. My temper I dare not vouch for. It is, I believe, too little yielding and perhaps resentful. My good opinion once lost is lost forever.

ELIZABETH. *That* is a failing indeed. But you have chosen your fault well. I really cannot *laugh* at it. You are safe from me.

DARCY. There is, I believe, in every disposition a tendency to some particular evil, a natural defect, which even the best education cannot overcome.

ELIZABETH. And your defect is a propensity to hate everybody.

DARCY. (*Smiling:*) And yours is willfully to misunderstand them.

(Shift begins, bringing us back to Longbourn.)

LYDIA. *(To the audience:)* On Sunday the carriage was sent and Jane and Elizabeth returned home. Mamma, I fear, was not very cordial to them.

MRS. BENNET. I cannot for the life of me see Elizabeth why you had to rush Jane home.

JANE. I wasn't rushed Mamma.

MR. BENNET. Well, I for one am gratified, our evening conversation had lost much of its animation and almost all its sense.

MRS. BENNET. *(Reprovingly:)* Mr. Bennet ...

LYDIA. Oh, poo...

MR. BENNET. My dear, I hope that you have ordered a good dinner today, because I have reason to expect an addition to our family party.

MRS. BENNET. Is it Mr. Bingley? Why Jane, you never dropped a word of this— you sly thing.

MR. BENNET. It is not Mr. Bingley, it is my cousin Mr. Collins, who when I am dead may turn you all out of this house as soon as he pleases.

KITTY. But why Papa?

MR. BENNET. It is the entail Kitty, the entail of which I often remind you. The inheritance of my property is limited to male heirs, and I, having produced none, my cousin Mr. Collins has become the legal recipient. Now—

MRS. BENNET. Pray do not talk of that odious man and this odious legality. It is monstrous that your estate should be entailed away from your own children!

KITTY. *(To the audience:)* Mr. Collins was punctual to his time.

(An ominous knock. The BENNETS all turn. COLLINS enters.)

COLLINS. Ah, Mrs. Bennet, Mr. Bennet, as a pastor of the Church of England I flatter myself that my present overtures of good will

are highly commendable and that the circumstances of my being next in the entail of the Longbourn estate will be kindly overlooked on your part and not lead you to reject my proffered olive branch.

(He bows.)

As for your daughters, I have heard much of their beauty, but in the instance, fame has fallen short of the truth and I doubt not seeing them, as I might say, to be well disposed of in marriage.

MRS. BENNET. You are very kind, sir, and I wish with all my heart it may prove so; for else they will be destitute enough.

COLLINS. I am very sensible, madam, of the hardship of my fair cousins, but I can assure the young ladies that I come prepared to admire them. At present I will not say more, but perhaps when we are better acquainted.

(The other BENNETS scatter and exit leaving COLLINS with MRS. BENNET.)

COLLINS. Thus, in conclusion I may say that having a good house and good living as a clergyman, I intend to marry, and in reconciliation with your family, I propose to choose one of your daughters. Surely you will agree that this atonement is an excellent one both generous and disinterested on my part.

MRS. BENNET. Indeed.

COLLINS. I very much approve your eldest...

MRS. BENNET. Jane.

COLLINS. Indeed. I conceive her both fetching and decorous. She should do quite nicely and seniority must be served.

MRS. BENNET. Jane. Sir, as to my younger daughters I cannot take it upon myself to say but I know of no predispositions. Concerning my eldest daughter...

COLLINS. Jane?

MRS. BENNET. Jane.

COLLINS. Jane.

MRS. BENNET. I feel it incumbent to say she is very likely to be soon engaged.

COLLINS. I see. And the next in age?

MRS. BENNET. Elizabeth.

COLLINS. Elizabeth, yes. Very forthright and not at all unpresentable.

MRS. BENNET. *(Taps his chest.)* Done.

(Shift begins out of Longbourn, leaving us with a bare stage for the "stroll to Meryton." LYDIA appears followed by MR. BENNET, KITTY and ELIZABETH. To the audience.)

LYDIA. To escape Mr. Collins' lectures...

MR. BENNET. On the high quality and moral fitness of the pastorate of the Church of England...

KITTY. Papa suggested a stroll to Meryton.

MR. BENNET. For I supposed him better fitted for a walker than a talker.

(They set off. COLLINS with MR. BENNET, LYDIA with KITTY and ELIZABETH behind.)

COLLINS. Indeed, one must first learn that the highest laws for the governance of a Christian duty...

LYDIA. And no sooner had I arrived at the regimental trumpetry than three ensigns bowed all at once...

COLLINS. ...and discovered from within not from without ...

LYDIA. And all three asked me to walk out with them...

COLLINS. ...that no man can become a serviceable servant solely by obedience to written edicts and though the principals elucidated...

LYDIA. La, said I, I am but one young lady as you can plainly...

KITTY. *(To audience:)* When we soon espied...

(LYDIA follows her gaze.)

LYDIA. Oh. Yoo hoo.

KITTY. A newly arrived officer of the regiment...

LYDIA. Yoo hoo!

KITTY. Of most gentlemanlike appearance who was introduced to us...

LYDIA. *(To audience:)* By an officer already of our acquaintance as...

OFFICER. Mr. Wickham.

KITTY. His appearance was greatly in his favour.

LYDIA. He had all the best parts of beauty...

KITTY. A fine countenance...

LYDIA. A good figure...

KITTY. And very pleasing address.

WICKHAM. How do you do. This is a lucky chance indeed. At the officers' table the Bennets are much spoken of and all of it approbation.

(Turns to the younger sisters.)

Miss Catherine and Miss Lydia are you not?

(They laugh merrily.)

Wrong way round?

KITTY. Quite topsy turvy.

WICKHAM. Profoundly sorry. I hope to be correct in addressing you as Miss Elizabeth Bennet.

ELIZABETH. Yes, quite correct.

WICKHAM. I solicit your further acquaintance Miss Bennet.

ELIZABETH. Our society sir is not extensive, I venture we will meet again.

LYDIA. *(To the audience:)* La, we were talking oh so very agreeably when the sound of horses drew our notice...

KITTY. *(To audience:)* And Mr. Bingley and Darcy came riding by...

ELIZABETH. *(To audience:)* Mr. Wickham barely touched his hat which Mr. Darcy hardly deigned to return.

KITTY, LYDIA, ELIZABETH. What could be the meaning of it?

LYDIA. Before walking on we naturally enjoined Mr. Wickham to pay us a visit.

WICKHAM. With very great pleasure indeed. I fear we poor souls in the army lack greatly in feminine instruction.

(KITTY and LYDIA laugh merrily.)

WICKHAM. Miss Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. Mr. Wickham.

LYDIA. La, but our sister has made a conquest.

(She giggles with KITTY.)

ELIZABETH. Lydia.

(Shift begins into Longbourn. The ladies and MR. BENNET filter back into the parlor where COLLINS is holding forth.)

COLLINS. I am very fortunate in my patroness the nonpareil Lady Catherine de Bourgh who has condescended to take me in hand.

(LADY CATHERINE appears on second level.)

COLLINS. What beauty! What elevated style and affability! She is, of course, the proprietress of Rosings and of very, very, very, very extensive property. Her daughter's indifferent health unhappily prevents her being in town, which as I told Lady Catherine myself, one day, has deprived the British court of its brightest ornament.

(MRS. BENNET sees MR. BENNET nodding off and gives him a tap. Startled, he speaks.)

MR. BENNET. Absolutely splendid!

(LYDIA enters excited. LADY CATHERINE's reveal ends.)

LYDIA. Mr. Wickham has arrived!

(He enters.)

LYDIA. Mr. George Wickham, Papa.

MRS. BENNET. Pleased.

MR. BENNET. Delighted.

ELIZABETH. Parson Collins, Mr. Wickham.

WICKHAM. Always a pleasure to meet a gentleman of the cloth. I had a near miss myself.

(Shift begins out of Longbourn on the words. Bushes, indicating that we are in the garden, enter.)

MARY. *(To the audience:)* As Mr. Collins once again held forth.

COLLINS. I have more than once observed to Lady Catherine that her charming daughter seemed born to be a Duchess; and that the most elevated rank, instead of giving her consequence, would be adorned by her. But to be brief...

ELIZABETH. Mr. Wickham suggested that I show him around the grounds.

(The shift is complete, and ELIZABETH and WICKHAM are left alone on the grounds.)

WICKHAM. Please excuse my temerity in accepting your sisters' kind invitation with an almost unbecoming alacrity.

ELIZABETH. It is a great kindness to seek us out. The regiment, I hope, is not unhappily quartered here?

WICKHAM. I cannot speak for the regiment but I may say I am personally improved by acquaintance with your family.

ELIZABETH. A courtesy very prettily put.

WICKHAM. And sincerely meant.

ELIZABETH. I could not help noticing, sir, a certain coolness of regard passing between yourself and Mr. Darcy.

WICKHAM. You have a keen eye Miss Bennet.

ELIZABETH. And a curious one, sir.

WICKHAM. Might you tell me how far Netherfield is from Meryton?

ELIZABETH. Three miles perhaps.

WICKHAM. Indeed? How long has Mr. Darcy been staying there?

ELIZABETH. About a month. He is a man of very large property in Derbyshire, I understand.

WICKHAM. His estate there is a noble one. In fact I have been connected with his family from my infancy. Are you much acquainted with him?

ELIZABETH. I have spent four days in the same house with him, and I think him very disagreeable.

WICKHAM. I believe your opinion of him would in general astonish.

ELIZABETH. Really? He is not at all liked in Hertfordshire.

WICKHAM. May I express surprise? The world is perhaps blinded by his fortune and consequence and sees him only as he chooses to be seen.

ELIZABETH. I should take him even on my slight acquaintance to be an ill-tempered man.

WICKHAM. I fear I have considerable knowledge of him. The late Mr. Darcy, his father, was excessively attached to me. I cannot do justice to his kindness. His son and I were born in the same parish, sharing the same amusements. My father was his father's estate manager. The elder Mr. Darcy knew the church ought to be my profession and he promised me the family parish when it came available or, if not, a voluntary promise of providing for me. Both were countermanded by young Darcy after his father's death.

ELIZABETH. On what grounds?

WICKHAM. Had the late Mr. Darcy liked me less, his son might have borne with me better; but his father's uncommon attachment to me irritated him. He had not a temper to bear the sort of competition in which we stood. In short, his behaviour to me has been

scandalous. But I do not trust myself on the subject, I can hardly be fair to him now.

ELIZABETH. I had not thought Mr. Darcy as bad as this.

WICKHAM. I do feel that almost all his actions may be traced to his considerable pride.

ELIZABETH. But can such abominable pride as his have ever done him good?

(A park bench is brought on.)

WICKHAM. I must own him to be liberal and generous, display hospitality, assist his tenants and relieve the poor. Family pride and filial pride have done this. His father's preference for me has pricked that pride and made him my enemy.

ELIZABETH. I am astonished at his intimacy with Mr. Bingley. Do you know him?

WICKHAM. Not at all.

ELIZABETH. He is a sweet tempered, amiable, charming man. He cannot know what Mr. Darcy is.

WICKHAM. Mr. Darcy can please where he chooses. He does not want abilities.

ELIZABETH. My judgment would be that he deserves to be publicly disgraced.

WICKHAM. Sometime or other he will be—but it shall not be by me. Miss Bennet, allow me to say, that the troubling aspect of our subject has not made you a whit less delightful.

ELIZABETH. I must suppose that the relationship you have described will not allow your presence at the coming ball at Netherfield.

WICKHAM. I would fear a discomfort for all involved, but make no mistake Miss Bennet, I keenly feel the loss.

(He bows and departs.)

ELIZABETH. *(To the audience:)* Well, whatever he said was well said and whatever he did was done gracefully.

(Park bench and bushes are struck, leaving us with a bare stage. JANE enters to ELIZABETH.)

JANE. But dear sister, I am all astonishment and concern I know not how to believe Mr. Darcy could be so unworthy of Mr. Bingley's regard.

ELIZABETH. I can much more easily believe Mr. Bingley's being imposed on than Mr. Wickham should invent such a history of himself.

JANE. But it is so distressing. One does not know what to think.

ELIZABETH. I beg your pardon; one knows exactly what to think.

JANE. I know only with certainty that poor Mr. Bingley would have much to suffer if Wickham's charge becomes public.

ELIZABETH. "Poor Mr. Bingley?"

JANE. *(Flushed:)* I speak only as an observer.

(JANE moves away, we are at Longbourn.)

ELIZABETH. *(As BINGLEY and his sister appear, revealed on the first level.)* Back at home Mr. Bingley and his sister came to give their personal invitation for the long expected ball at Netherfield which was fixed for the following Tuesday.

(BINGLEY hands ELIZABETH an invitation, bows and disappears. COLLINS appears.)

ELIZABETH. While Mr. Collins...

COLLINS. I am by no means of the opinion, I assure you, that a ball of this kind, given by a young man of character can have any evil tendency and I am so far from objecting to dancing myself that I take this opportunity Miss Elizabeth of soliciting the first two dances with you especially.

ELIZABETH. *(Back to audience as COLLINS disappears:)* And it struck me that I had been selected from among my sisters as worthy of being the mistress of Hunsford Parsonage.

(Shift begins into ball at Netherfield. Music begins. Dancers enter. ELIZABETH dances with COLLINS. JANE speaks to the audience.)

JANE. I perceived that Elizabeth still longed to see Mr. Wickham among those assembled...

KITTY. Seeking the conquest of all that remained unsubdued of his heart.

(BINGLEY sweeps JANE away and another young man, KITTY. ELIZABETH escapes COLLINS and speaks to us.)

ELIZABETH. I might title them “dances of mortification.”

(DARCY approaches ELIZABETH.)

DARCY. May I hope for the next Miss Bennet?

ELIZABETH. *(Taken aback:)* Well, I hardly think...

(But before she can finish the sentence she is taken aside by CHARLOTTE.)

CHARLOTTE. Do not be a simpleton and allow your fancy for Wickham to make you appear unpleasant in the eyes of a man of ten times his consequence.

(Waltz music begins. She gives her a push back to DARCY. The stage clears, leaving them alone.)

DARCY. Well then.

(They waltz.)

ELIZABETH. The music is well played do you not think?

(He nods. After they dance silently for a moment.)

ELIZABETH. It is your turn to say something now, Mr. Darcy. I talked about the dance, and you ought to make some kind of remark on the size of the room, or the number of couples.

DARCY. I quite assure you that whatever you wish me to say will be said.

ELIZABETH. Very well, that reply will do for the present, now we may be silent.

DARCY. Do you talk by the rule then when you are dancing?

ELIZABETH. I have always, Mr. Darcy, seen a great similarity in the turn of our minds. We are each of an unsocial taciturn disposition, unwilling to speak unless we expect to say something that will amaze the whole room, and be handed down to posterity with all the *éclat* of a proverb.

DARCY. This is no very striking resemblance of your own character, I am sure. How near it may be to mine I cannot pretend to say.

ELIZABETH. I have recently had the pleasure of forming a new acquaintance with a childhood friend of yours.

(They stop dancing.)

ELIZABETH. A Mr. Wickham.

DARCY. Mr. Wickham is blessed with such happy manners as may ensure his making friends—whether he may be equally capable of retaining them, is less certain.

ELIZABETH. He has been so unlucky as to lose *your* friendship, and in a manner which he is likely to suffer from all his life.

(A silence.)

DARCY. What think you of books Miss Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH. I cannot talk of books in a ballroom, my head is full of something else.

(DARCY inclines his head civilly and begins to turn away.)

ELIZABETH. I remember hearing you say Mr. Darcy that you hardly ever forgave, that your resentment once created was unappeasable. You are very cautious, I suppose as to its being created?

DARCY. I am.

ELIZABETH. And never allow yourself to be blinded by prejudice?

DARCY. May I ask to what these questions tend?

ELIZABETH. Merely to the illustration of your character. I am trying to make it out.

DARCY. And what is your success?

ELIZABETH. I do not get on at all. I hear such different accounts of you as to puzzle me exceedingly.

DARCY. I can readily believe that reports may vary greatly with respect to me; and I could wish, Miss Bennet, that you would not sketch my character at present, as there is reason to fear that the performance would reflect no credit on either.

(COLLINS enters to them.)

COLLINS. Ah, Mr. Darcy, you are if I am not mistaken the nephew of my eminent patroness Lady Catherine de Bourgh who secured for me the living at Hunsford Parsonage thus allow me to observe that I consider the clerical office as equal in point of dignity with the highest rank in the kingdom—provided that a proper humility of behaviour is at the same time maintained.

DARCY. You have neglected your name sir.

COLLINS. *(Taken aback:)* Have I?

DARCY. You have.

COLLINS. Mr. Collins, sir.

DARCY. *(Bowing, speaking and departing:)* Delighted.

(He moves away. ELIZABETH stares in wonderment at COLLINS.)

COLLINS. Excellent, most excellent. I have no reason, I assure you, to be dissatisfied with my reception. He answered me with the utmost civility and, upon the whole, I am much pleased with him.

ELIZABETH. Though he neglected his name?

(She leaves him.)

COLLINS. Did he?

MISS BINGLEY. *(The ball begins. Coming towards ELIZABETH:)* So, Miss Eliza, I hear you are quite delighted with George Wickham...Oh yes, your sister Jane has been talking with me...did you know he was the son of the late Mr. Darcy's steward?

ELIZABETH. I believe he so asserted.

MISS BINGLEY. Let me recommend you, however, as a friend, not to give implicit confidence to all his assertions. As to Mr. Darcy's using him ill, it is perfectly false, for, on the contrary he has always been remarkably kind to him.

ELIZABETH. Well...

MISS BINGLEY. George Wickham has treated Mr. Darcy in a most infamous manner. I do not know the particulars but his coming into the country at all is a most insolent thing. Considering his descent, one could not expect much better.

ELIZABETH. His guilt and his descent appear by your account to be one and the same, for I have heard you accuse him of nothing worse than of being the son of Mr. Darcy's steward, and of that, I can assure you, he informed me himself.

MISS BINGLEY. I beg your pardon. Please excuse my interference, it was kindly meant.

(She coldly moves away.)

ELIZABETH. *(To herself:)* Insolent girl.

(She watches JANE and BINGLEY dance.)

BINGLEY. *(To JANE:)* By heavens, you step it wonderfully!

JANE. Under your instruction, sir.

ELIZABETH. *(Watching them:)* Well, that at least promises the felicity which a marriage of true affection can bestow.

(MRS. BENNET has cornered MISS BINGLEY.)

MRS. BENNET. Ah, Miss Bingley...

(Who is watching her brother dance.)

MRS. BENNET. I'm sure I needn't enumerate the advantages of such a match...

ELIZABETH. Mamma...

MRS. BENNET. Such an advantage living but three miles apart, and such a comfort knowing how fond you are of Jane...

ELIZABETH. *(Taking her mother's arm:)* Sadly, our carriage waits...

MRS. BENNET. But...

ELIZABETH. And we must go.

(Moves her mother away from MISS BINGLEY who departs. They are immediately stopped by COLLINS.)

COLLINS. Ah Miss Elizabeth, it is a great shame we footed it but once.

(ELIZABETH escapes him. Shift begins back to Longbourn as LYDIA speaks to the audience.)

LYDIA. When at last the guests and officers quitted the house, Mamma spoke all the way home of preparations, new carriages, wedding clothes and seeing Jane settled at Netherfield within three months.

(Starts to leave; turns back.)

Oh, and Mr. Collins' marriage to Elizabeth as well.

COLLINS. *(To MRS. BENNET:)* May I hope, Madam, for your interest in the matter of your penultimate eldest, Elizabeth, for I solicit the honour of a private audience with her in the course of this morning.

MRS. BENNET. What? Oh yes, I see... dear me... yes, certainly... A private audience, I see the drift. Dear Mr. Collins, I am sure Lizzy will be very happy—I am sure she can have no objection. A private audience! Come Kitty, I want you upstairs.

ELIZABETH. Dear Madam, do not go.

MRS. BENNET. Not go?

ELIZABETH. Mr. Collins must excuse me. He can have nothing to say to me that anybody need not hear. I am going away myself.

MRS. BENNET. Nonsense Lizzy. I desire you will stay where you are.

(ELIZABETH *turns to go.*)

MRS. BENNET. Lizzy, I insist upon your staying and hearing Mr. Collins. Come Kitty.

(*Grabs her by the arms and exits with her.*)

MRS. BENNET. Stay!

COLLINS. Your modesty adds only to your other perfections, for my attentions have been too marked to be mistaken. But before I am run away with by my feelings...I shall enumerate my reasons for marrying. First, to set the example of matrimony in my parish...

ELIZABETH. Of course.

COLLINS. Secondly, it greatly adds to a man's well being. And thirdly by the particular advice and recommendation of Lady de Bourgh, my patroness "Let her be an active, useful sort of person able to make a small income go a long way," her very words. You may observe, fair cousin that I do not reckon the notice of Lady Catherine de Bourgh the least of my advantages. Your wit and vivacity, I think, must be acceptable to her, especially when tempered with the silence and respect which her rank invariably excites. Fourth, as I am to inherit this estate after the death of your honoured father, I feel bound to choose a wife from among his daughters that the loss to them might be as little as possible.

ELIZABETH. (*Fuming:*) Hmmmm.

COLLINS. And now nothing remains for me but to assure you in the most animated language of the violence of my affection. To fortune I am perfectly indifferent, and as to dowry, I am well aware of your father's finances and you may assure yourself that no ungenerous reproach shall ever pass my lips when we are married.

ELIZABETH. No.

COLLINS. No?

ELIZABETH. I am very sensible of the honour of your proposals but it is impossible for me to do otherwise than decline them.

COLLINS. Oh, it is usual with young ladies to reject at first the addresses of the man they secretly mean to accept.

ELIZABETH. I do assure you that I am not one of those young ladies. You could not make me happy and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who would make you so. Were your friend Lady Catherine to know me, she would find me in every respect ill qualified. This matter may be considered, therefore, as finally settled.

COLLINS. Naturally you cannot be serious in your rejection of me. Good sense and financial necessity forbid it. It is your wish to increase my love by suspense, according to the usual practice of elegant females.

ELIZABETH. I am not, Mr. Collins, an elegant female intending to plague you. I am a rational creature speaking the truth from her heart. I will not have you. Can I speak plainer?

COLLINS. You are uniformly charming!

(ELIZABETH exits. MRS. BENNET enters.)

MRS. BENNET. Dear Mr. Collins, allow me to be the first to congratulate you!

COLLINS. She has begun delightfully with a refusal.

MRS. BENNET. A refusal?!

COLLINS. Out of bashful modesty and the genuine delicacy of her character.

MRS. BENNET. *(Calling offstage:)* Mr. Bennet you are wanted immediately!

(To COLLINS:)

She is a headstrong foolish girl, and does not know her own interest...

COLLINS. Headstrong...

MRS. BENNET. ...but I will make her know it.

COLLINS. Headstrong? Foolish? Dear me, if so it were better not to force her acceptance because if liable to such defects of temper, she could not contribute much to my felicity.

(MR. BENNET *enters.*)

MRS. BENNET. Mr. Bennet, you must come and make Lizzy marry Mr. Collins for she vows she will not have him.

COLLINS. Pray, excuse me.

(*He exits.*)

MR. BENNET. I have not the pleasure of understanding you.

MRS. BENNET. ...and Mr. Collins begins to say he will not have Lizzy. Lizzy!

MR. BENNET. And what am I to do on the occasion?

MRS. BENNET. Why tell her you insist upon her marrying him.

(ELIZABETH *enters.*)

MR. BENNET. Come here child. Is it true Mr. Collins has made you an offer of marriage?

ELIZABETH. It is.

MR. BENNET. And this offer of marriage you have refused?

ELIZABETH. I have sir.

MR. BENNET. An unhappy alternative is before you Elizabeth. Your mother will never see you again if you do not marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you do.

MRS. BENNET. I tell you what Miss Lizzy, go on in this way and you will never get a husband at all—and I am sure I do not know who is to maintain you when your father is dead.

(MR. COLLINS *enters.*)

MRS. BENNET. Oh, Mr. Collins.

COLLINS. Please excuse me, but I wish to withdraw my pretensions to your daughter's favour. I have come to feel that her high spirits may not find their perfect expression in the somewhat circumscribed life of the parsonage. I have certainly meant well and if my manner has been in any way reprehensible, I here beg leave to apologize. I am resigned but, I hope improved. Resignation is never

so perfect as when the blessing denied begins to lose its value in our estimation.

(He exits.)

MRS. BENNET. Miss Lizzy, I shall simply say that I will never speak to you again and you will find me as good as my word. I have no pleasure in talking to undutiful children.

(She exits. Shift begins to new configuration of Longbourn furniture.)

KITTY. *(Steps forward:)* The discussion of Mr. Collin's offer was now nearly at an end; but rather than decamp in disarray he made it known...

LYDIA. ...that he was always to have gone on Saturday and to Saturday he still meant to stay.

KITTY. And...

LYDIA. ...the assiduous attentions paid to Lizzy were transferred...

(CHARLOTTE LUCAS is revealed.)

KITTY. ...to Charlotte Lucas who was visiting...

LYDIA. ...whose civility in listening to him...

KITTY, LYDIA. ...was a seasonable relief to us all.

(CHARLOTTE and COLLINS walk off arm in arm. KITTY immediately turns to JANE with a letter.)

KITTY. Jane, this has come from Netherfield.

JANE. *(Unfolds the note.)* From Netherfield?

KITTY. Caroline Bingley says their whole party are leaving for town without any intention of coming back again...

JANE. *(Reading:)* "I do not pretend to regret anything I shall leave in Hertfordshire except your society my dearest friend." It is evident by this that Mr. Bingley comes back no more this winter.

ELIZABETH. It is only evident that Miss Bingley does not mean he *should*.

JANE. I will read you the passage which particularly hurts me. I will have no reserves from you. "Mr. Darcy is impatient to see his younger sister; and to confess the truth we are scarcely less eager to meet her again. Georgiana has no equal for beauty, elegance and accomplishments and we dare entertain the hope of her being hereafter our sister."

ELIZABETH. Foolishness, she is a child.

JANE. Is it not clear enough? Does it not expressly declare that Caroline neither expects nor wishes me to be her sister and that she is perfectly convinced of her brother's indifference to me? Can there be any other opinion on the subject?

ELIZABETH. Yes, there can; for mine is totally different. Will you hear it?

JANE. Most willingly.

ELIZABETH. It is this. Miss Bingley sees that her brother is in love with you and wants him to marry Georgiana Darcy. I also suspect that Mr. Bingley's regard was further suppressed by his friend, Mr. Darcy's, interference. He watched you most narrowly as you danced.

JANE. You must not criticize, Lizzy. Perhaps I have imagined Mr. Bingley's regard. Women fancy admiration means more than it does.

ELIZABETH. And men take care that it should. His sister has influenced him as well Jane, in conjunction with his friend.

JANE. Surely she only wishes his happiness.

ELIZABETH. Oh, she may wish many things beside his happiness. Such as an increase in wealth, consequence and great connections.

JANE. No, Lizzy. I think no ill of him or his sister. Let me take it in the best light, in the light in which it may be understood. I have at least the comfort that it has not been more than an error of fancy on my side, and that it has done no harm to anyone but myself.

ELIZABETH. Really, you are too good. You wish to think all the world respectable. The more I see of the world the more I am

dissatisfied with it; and every day confirms my belief of the inconsistency of all human characters. I have come to distrust the appearance of either merit or sense.

JANE. You must not hinder your happiness on my behalf.

(She exits and MR. BENNET enters.)

MR. BENNET. So Lizzy, your sister is crossed in love, I find. I congratulate her. Next to being married, a girl likes to be crossed in love a little now and then. You will hardly bear to be long outdone by Jane. Here are officers enough at Meryton to disappoint all the young ladies in the country. Let Wickham be your man. He is a pleasant fellow, and would jilt you creditably.

ELIZABETH. Thank you, sir, but a less agreeable man would satisfy me. We must not all expect Jane's good fortune.

(ELIZABETH exits one way, MR. BENNET another, and LYDIA moves to the audience.)

LYDIA. Amazement! Within the very week and in as short a time as Mr. Collin's long speeches would allow, all was settled between him and Charlotte Lucas by way... by way of...

JANE. *(Revealed on first level.)* Domestic arrangement...

LYDIA. And Lizzy feels she accepted him solely from...

ELIZABETH. *(Poking her head in:)* The pure and disinterested desire of an establishment...

LYDIA. And as Mamma said...

MRS. BENNET. Cared not how that establishment was gained!

(JANE and ELIZABETH meet.)

ELIZABETH. Charlotte's marriage is unaccountable! In every view unaccountable!

JANE. My dear Lizzy, do not give way to such feelings as these. They will ruin your happiness.

(JANE leaves and CHARLOTTE enters to ELIZABETH.)

ELIZABETH. Engaged to Mr. Collins! My dear Charlotte, impossible!

CHARLOTTE. Why should you be so surprised, my dear Eliza? Do you think it incredible that Mr. Collins should be able to procure any woman's good opinion because he was not so happy as to succeed with you?

ELIZABETH. Indeed not, but two offers of marriage in three days?

CHARLOTTE. Dear Eliza, I am sure when you have had time to think it all over that you will be satisfied for me. I am not a romantic, you know, I never was.

(Starts to leave.)

You must come and visit the parsonage as soon as ever you can.

(MR. and MRS. BENNET enter as CHARLOTTE exits.)

MRS. BENNET. And I tell you Mr. Collins has been taken in! Worse, Elizabeth I am sure, is the cause of all the mischief.

MR. BENNET. No.

MRS. BENNET. I tell you we are in a pitiable state. Because of the entail Charlotte Lucas will be mistress of this house and I will be forced to make way for her and live to see her take my place in it!

MR. BENNET. Let us hope for better things. Let us flatter ourselves that I may be the survivor.

(Shift to different Longbourn configuration.)

KITTY. *(To the audience:)* In our gloom, Mr. Wickham's society was of material service, and his betrayal by Mr. Darcy was general knowledge. We all agreed that...

KITTY, LYDIA, ELIZABETH. Mr. Darcy was the worst of men.

(KITTY and LYDIA exit.)

ELIZABETH. On the following Monday the Gardiners, my mother's brother and his wife arrived.

(We see them at the back of the stage.)

He is a sensible, gentleman-like man and Mrs. Gardiner, as always, enlivened the premises by distributing presents, describing the newest fashions and the giving of sage advice.

(MR. GARDINER *exits*. MRS. GARDINER *moves down to ELIZABETH.*)

MRS. GARDINER. A young man such as you describe Mr. Bingley so easily falls in love with a pretty girl for a few weeks and just as easily forgets her. Now as to Mr. Wickham, whom you mention far too frequently, I would have you be on your guard.

ELIZABETH. Oh, he shall not be in love with me if I can prevent it.

MRS. GARDINER. Do not involve yourself in an affection which the want of fortune should make very imprudent.

ELIZABETH. At present I am not in love with Mr. Wickham but I count him as the most agreeable man I ever saw.

MRS. GARDINER. Unwise.

ELIZABETH. But how can I be wiser than so many of my fellow-creatures if I am tempted, or how am I even to know that it would be wisdom to resist? All that I can promise you therefore, is not to be in a hurry.

MRS. GARDINER. I say no more. I shall take Jane with me to London, poor girl, as a change of scene might be of service. It had better have happened to you Lizzy; you would have laughed yourself out of it sooner. I understand you are to visit the Collinses in their newly married state and you must visit me as well.

(JANE *enters above them. She is in London.* MRS. GARDINER *joins her.*)

ELIZABETH. (*To the audience:*) As March was to take me to Hunsford Parsonage, the improvement of spending a night in London made the plan perfect as plan could be.

(*Shift begins into MRS. GARDINER's London home.* ELIZABETH *"enters" to JANE.*)

ELIZABETH. Jane! Look now, I see London is agreeable to you.

JANE. My dearest Lizzy. Sit with me.

ELIZABETH. With every pleasure. You look so well.

JANE. I confess myself to have been entirely deceived in Miss Bingley's regard for me. She has barely visited me here in London and when she did come it was very evident she had no pleasure in it, in fact she seemed to have come to convince me of her brother's interest in Miss Darcy.

MRS. GARDINER. All gentlemen are held in my lowest repute. It is said that Mr. Wickham is now the admirer of a certain Miss King...

ELIZABETH. Oh.

MRS. GARDINER. Whose most remarkable charm, I might add, seems to be the acquisition through family mortality of ten thousand pounds and it is at the least indelicate to direct his attentions toward her so soon after this event. You are pale Elizabeth, are you ill?

ELIZABETH. A man in distressed circumstances has not time for the elegant decorums which others might observe. If she does not object to it, why should we?

MRS. GARDINER. *Her* not objecting to it does not justify him.

ELIZABETH. (*Pacing:*) I have a very poor opinion of young men who live in Derbyshire; and their intimate friends who live in Hertfordshire are not much better. I am sick of them all. Thank heaven I am going tomorrow to the Collinses' parsonage where I shall find a man who has not one agreeable quality, who has neither manner nor sense to recommend him. Perhaps stupid men are the only ones worth knowing after all.

MRS. GARDINER. Bravo. You must accompany Mr. Gardiner and myself on a tour of pleasure this summer where we shall avoid the sex altogether, and regard the landscape.

ELIZABETH. My dear aunt, what delight, what felicity! You give me fresh life and vigor. Adieu to disappointment and spleen. What are men to rocks and mountains!

(Shift out of Mrs. Gardiner's house to a bare stage. ELIZABETH speaks to the audience.)

Every object in my next day's journey was new and interesting, the chaise comfortable, the weather delightful and all conspired for the pleasure of the traveler. At length, the parsonage was discernible and Mr. Collins and Charlotte appeared at the gate.

(An actor appears, as the "gate". COLLINS and CHARLOTTE appear.)

CHARLOTTE. Dearest Eliza, you are welcome and then welcome again! Come in immediately you must be wearied and jostled.

(Two chairs indicating the parsonage are brought on. These two chairs will also form part of LADY CATHERINE's drawing room.)

COLLINS. I have news of Lady Catherine's delicate consideration and civility in inviting us to dine at Rosings the next night but one. Do not make yourself uneasy my dear cousin about your apparel. Lady Catherine will not think the worse of you for being simply dressed.

(Shift begins, and LADY CATHERINE's drawing room is assembled before us.)

ELIZABETH. The dinner was exceedingly handsome and there were all the servants and each article of plate which Mr. Collins had promised and elaborately described.

(CHARLOTTE joins her.)

CHARLOTTE. *(Confidingly:)* You must not be surprised that Mr. Darcy will be in attendance, bringing with him a Colonel Fitzwilliam, the younger son of his uncle.

(COLLINS enters with LADY CATHERINE.)

COLLINS. It is my pleasure to introduce the Right Honourable Lady Catherine de Bourgh, my esteemed patroness whose wit, affability and condescension make her the admired ornament of...

LADY CATHERINE. *(Stopping him with a gesture.)* Yes, yes, quite so. You are, I believe, Elizabeth Bennet.

ELIZABETH. I am.

LADY CATHERINE. Your father's estate is entailed on Mr. Collins, I think?

(To CHARLOTTE:)

For your sake I am glad of it; but otherwise I see no occasion for entailing estates from the female line.

(To COLLINS.)

A word Mr. Collins.

(Takes him away as DARCY and FITZWILLIAM enter.)

DARCY. Miss Bennet, I had not hoped to meet you here.

ELIZABETH. Nor I.

DARCY. Allow me to present Colonel Fitzwilliam.

FITZWILLIAM. Your beauty, oft reported, exceeds, Miss Bennet.

ELIZABETH. This has not been true Colonel Fitzwilliam in all quarters.

LADY CATHERINE. Miss Bennet, your family?

ELIZABETH. My family?

LADY CATHERINE. How many sisters have you, Miss Bennet?

ELIZABETH. I have four sisters.

LADY CATHERINE. That is a great many. Are you the eldest?

ELIZABETH. I am the second.

LADY CATHERINE. Are they handsome?

ELIZABETH. Indeed.

LADY CATHERINE. Do your sisters play and sing? Do you draw?

ELIZABETH. No, not at all.

LADY CATHERINE. What, none of you?

(ELIZABETH shakes her head.)

LADY CATHERINE. That is very strange. Has your governess left you?

ELIZABETH. We never had a governess.

LADY CATHERINE. No governess! How was that possible? Five daughters brought up at home without a governess! I never heard of such a thing. Your mother must have been quite a slave to your education.

ELIZABETH. Not perhaps as you might think.

LADY CATHERINE. Then who taught you? Who attended to you?

ELIZABETH. Such of us as wished to learn never wanted the means. We were always encouraged to read, and books were always provided. Those who chose to be idle certainly might.

LADY CATHERINE. Aye, no doubt; but that is what a governess will prevent; had I known your mother, I should have advised her most strenuously to engage one. Are any of your younger sisters out?

ELIZABETH. Yes, ma'am, all.

LADY CATHERINE. All! All five out at once? Very odd! The younger ones out before the eldest are married!

ELIZABETH. But really, ma'am, I think it would be very hard upon younger sisters that they should not have their share of society and amusement, because the elder may not have the means or inclination to marry early.

LADY CATHERINE. Upon my word, you give your opinion very decidedly for so young a person. Pray what is your age?

ELIZABETH. With three younger sisters grown up, your ladyship can hardly expect me to own it.

(FITZWILLIAM leans over to talk to her.)

LADY CATHERINE. What is that you are saying Fitzwilliam? What are you telling Miss Bennet?

FITZWILLIAM. We are speaking of music, madam.

LADY CATHERINE. Of music? Then pray speak aloud.

FITZWILLIAM. I am reminding Miss Bennet of her earlier promise to favour us at the pianoforte.

ELIZABETH. (*To LADY CATHERINE:*) Ah, yes. Pray excuse me.

(Moves to the piano.)

I fear you will not find me a great proficient.

(Begins to play.)

Pray continue your conversation rather than attend me.

LADY CATHERINE. (*Listens for a moment as ELIZABETH plays.*) I often tell young ladies, that no excellence in music is to be acquired without constant practice.

ELIZABETH. (*ELIZABETH seated at the pianoforte finds DARCY stationed where he may closely observe her.*) You mean to frighten me, Mr. Darcy but my courage always rises with every attempt to intimidate me.

DARCY. You could not really believe me to entertain any design of alarming you. I have had the pleasure of your acquaintance long enough to know that you find great enjoyment in occasionally professing opinions which in fact are not your own.

(ELIZABETH stops playing, laughs.)

ELIZABETH. (*To FITZWILLIAM:*) Your cousin will give you a very pretty notion of me and teach you not to believe a word I say. Take care sir, for you are provoking me to retaliate and such things may come out as will shock your relations to hear.

DARCY. (*Smiling:*) I am not afraid of you.

FITZWILLIAM. Pray let me hear what you accuse him of? I should like to know how such a paragon behaves among strangers.

ELIZABETH. You shall hear then, but prepare for something very dreadful. The first time of ever my seeing him was at a ball and he refused to dance, and more than one young lady was sitting down in want of a partner.

DARCY. I had not at that time the honour of knowing any lady in the assembly and I am ill qualified to recommend myself to strangers.

ELIZABETH. Shall we ask him why a man of sense and education who has lived in the world is ill qualified to recommend himself to strangers?

DARCY. I have not the talent of conversing easily with those I have never seen before.

ELIZABETH. Well fortunately for all present that is not the case here.

(ELIZABETH moves down to the audience.)

Strangely and unexpectedly after our...delightful evening...at Lady Catherine de Bourgh's,

(Shift begins out of Lady Catherine's, to a bare stage.)

the two cousins came often, of an afternoon, to the parsonage. It was plain that Colonel Fitzwilliam came because he took pleasure in Charlotte's and my society but why Mr. Darcy came so often was more difficult to understand.

(CHARLOTTE joins ELIZABETH.)

CHARLOTTE. If you would not laugh me to scorn Eliza, I might suggest the possibility of his being partial to you.

ELIZABETH. *(Startled into laughter:)* The gentleman seldom meets my eyes and frequently sits there ten minutes together without opening his lips.

CHARLOTTE. Ah, but he often looks at you quite appraisingly when your look is engaged elsewhere.

ELIZABETH. Stuff. I am going for a ramble in the park.

(She moves off, donning a red cape. CHARLOTTE exits. COLONEL FITZWILLIAM enters and calls to ELIZABETH who is walking away from him.)

FITZWILLIAM. Ah, Miss Bennet.

ELIZABETH. Colonel Fitzwilliam, I did not know you ever walked this way.

FITZWILLIAM. Are you going much further?

ELIZABETH. No, I should have turned in a moment.

(He joins her.)

Do you certainly leave Kent on Saturday?

FITZWILLIAM. Yes, if Darcy does not put it off again.

ELIZABETH. I do not know anybody who seems more to enjoy the power of doing what he likes than Mr. Darcy.

FITZWILLIAM. But so we all do. It is only that he has better means of having it than many others and I am at his disposal.

ELIZABETH. I imagine your cousin brought you down with him for the sake of having somebody at his disposal. I wonder he does not marry, to secure a lasting convenience of that kind. But perhaps his sister does as well for the present as she is under his sole care.

FITZWILLIAM. In fact I am joined with him in the guardianship of Miss Darcy.

ELIZABETH. Are you indeed? Young ladies of her age are sometimes a little difficult to manage; and if she has true Darcy spirit, she may like to have her own way.

FITZWILLIAM. Indeed she is one of the most tractable creatures in the world and a great favourite of Miss Bingley. I think I have heard you say you know her?

ELIZABETH. A little. Darcy is uncommonly kind to Mr. Bingley, and takes a prodigious deal of care of him.

FITZWILLIAM. From something Darcy said, I have reason to think Bingley very much indebted to him. It is a circumstance which Darcy of course could not wish to be generally known because if it were to get round to the lady's family, it would be an unpleasant thing.

ELIZABETH. You may, of course, depend on my not mentioning it.

FITZWILLIAM. He told me merely that he congratulated himself on having lately saved a friend from the inconveniences of a most imprudent marriage and I only suspected it to be Bingley as his open nature might get him into a scrape of that sort.

ELIZABETH. Please pardon me, but I do not see what right Mr. Darcy had to decide on the propriety of a friend's inclination.

FITZWILLIAM. As I recall there were some very strong objections to the lady's family. I believe one was a country attorney and another with a sort of mercantile background and perhaps an unsuitable mother. But this is all conjecture. Good day to you, Miss Bennet.

(ELIZABETH breaks downstage. FITZWILLIAM continues off. Her speech is to herself.)

ELIZABETH. To Jane herself there could be no possibility of objection—all loveliness and goodness as she is! Neither could anything be urged against my father, who though with some peculiarities, has abilities Mr. Darcy himself need not disdain. Of course my mother... But Mr. Darcy would receive a deeper wound from the want of importance in his friend's connections than from their want of sense. He has been governed by this worst kind of pride, and partly from the wish of retaining Mr. Bingley for his sister.

(On the phrase "worst kind of pride," a chair enters for Elizabeth. She is now back at the parsonage. DARCY enters.)

DARCY. Miss Bennet.

ELIZABETH. Mr. Darcy.

DARCY. May I...would it be suitable if I...enquired of your health.

ELIZABETH. My health?

DARCY. As I've not...encountered you these past days I thought...I come to...enquire of your health.

ELIZABETH. My health, Mr. Darcy, meets all the usual standards.

DARCY. Ah.

ELIZABETH. Yes.

DARCY. Ah.

(A silence.)

DARCY. In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you.

(ELIZABETH, startled, looks down.)

DARCY. I see I dismay you. I am slow, even dilatory. I should have declared myself at an earlier date. But there were, of course, the family obstacles which judgment always opposed to inclination. The general sense of your social inferiority, of it being a degradation of the line. I could not forget my responsibility to an estate, a way of life, a pride of place which might given your circumstances disinclude you and thus the very ardency I described took place against my will and reason, or rather in opposition to my character and inclination, but the very strength of my attachment has made it impossible for me to conquer my feelings and I can only express the hope that these feelings will now be rewarded by your acceptance of my hand. There.

(She doesn't speak.)

DARCY. I have spoken ill but mean well, Miss Bennet.

ELIZABETH. In such cases as this, it is, I believe, the established mode to express a sense of obligation for the sentiments avowed however unequally they may be returned. It is natural that obligation should be felt, and if I could feel gratitude I would now thank you. But I cannot—I have never desired your good opinion, and you have certainly bestowed it most unwillingly. The feelings which you tell me have long prevented the acknowledgment of your regard can have little difficulty in overcoming it after this explanation.

DARCY. And this is all the reply which I am to have the honour of expecting! I might, perhaps, wish to be informed why, with so little endeavour at civility, I am thus rejected?

ELIZABETH. I might as well enquire, why, with so evident a design of offending and insulting me you chose to tell me that you

liked me against your will, against your reason and even against your character? Was not this some excuse for incivility, if I *was* uncivil? But I have other provocations. You know I have. Do you think that any consideration would tempt me to accept the man who has been the means of ruining, perhaps forever, the happiness of a beloved sister? You divided Mr. Bingley and Jane from each other, or at the very least yours was the principal means, involving them both in misery of the acutest kind. Can you deny that you have done it?

DARCY. I have no wish to deny that I did everything in my power to separate my friend from your sister, or that I rejoice in my success. Towards him I have been kinder than towards myself.

ELIZABETH. Quite clearly said. But it is not merely this affair on which my dislike is founded. Your character was unfolded in the recital which I received many months ago from Mr. Wickham.

DARCY. You take an eager interest in that gentleman's concerns.

ELIZABETH. Knowing his misfortunes who would not feel an interest in him?

DARCY. His misfortunes!

ELIZABETH. And of your infliction. You have withheld the advantages which you must know to have been designed for him and yet you treat the mention of his misfortunes with contempt.

DARCY. And this is your opinion of me! I thank you for explaining it so fully. These bitter accusations might have been suppressed had I, with greater policy flattered you into the belief of my being impelled by unqualified, unalloyed inclination. But disguise of every sort is my abhorrence.

ELIZABETH. The mode of your declaration has not affected me Mr. Darcy. You could not have made me the offer of your hand in any possible way that would have tempted me to accept it. From the very beginning your arrogance and selfish disdain for the feelings of others have built an immovable dislike. You are Mr. Darcy the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry.

DARCY. You have said quite enough, Madam. I perfectly comprehend your feelings. Forgive me for having taken up so much of your time, and accept my best wishes for your health and happiness.

(He exits. ELIZABETH moves downstage as the lights fade.)

End of Act I

ACT II

(ELIZABETH alone.)

ELIZABETH. Next morning I awoke to the same thoughts that had kept sleep long at bay and resolved to see what air and exercise might do for my meditations thus proceeded to my favourite walk.

(She walks. DARCY blocks her path.)

DARCY. I have been wandering in the grove some time in the hope of meeting you. Will you do me the honour of reading this letter?

(He hands it to her, moves away upstage of her where he becomes one of the voices in ELIZABETH's reading of the letter.)

ELIZABETH. *(Reading:)* "Two offences you last night laid to my charge. First that I had detached Mr. Bingley from your sister

(Throughout the reading of the letter characters appear and disappear in the six openings of the sky. Some on the first level, some on the second.)

and the other that I had in defiance of honour blasted the prospects of Mr. Wickham."

(WICKHAM appears.)

WICKHAM. Ah, Miss Bennet, you are well known in Hertfordshire ...

ELIZABETH. "...I had not been long in Hertfordshire..."

(BINGLEY appears.)

BINGLEY. Will you think me too forward if I apply to you for a second dance?

(JANE and BINGLEY dance together across the stage.)

ELIZABETH. "Before I observed my friend's behaviour and perceived his most surprising partiality..."

DARCY. Your sister I also watched...

ELIZABETH. “And though her manners were open and engaging there was no symptom of warm regard or sentiment. She received his attentions but remained, to my eye, indifferent.”

(JANE and BINGLEY finish dancing and exit.)

DARCY. My objections to the marriage proceeded also from other causes of repugnance. Your family’s want of propriety betrayed by your mother’s manners, your younger sisters’ forwardness, and even forgive me your father’s misplaced wit. All confirmed my sense...

ELIZABETH. “...that I must preserve my friend from a most unhappy connection.”

(MISS BINGLEY appears.)

DARCY. In London I found his sister’s uneasiness...

MISS BINGLEY. Has been greatly excited.

DARCY. And we were alike sensible that...

DARCY, MISS BINGLEY. No time should be lost in detaching him.

ELIZABETH. “Bingley has great natural modesty with a stronger dependence on my judgment than on his own.”

DARCY. To convince him he had deceived himself was not difficult.

ELIZABETH, DARCY. “On this subject I have nothing more to say and no apology to offer.”

DARCY. With respect to that other, more weighty accusation of having injured Mr. Wickham, that I will attempt to refute.

(BINGLEY, JANE and MISS BINGLEY exit. WICKHAM remains.)

WICKHAM. In short, his behavior to me has been scandalous.

DARCY. My father was not only fond of this young man’s society but hoped the church would be his profession...

ELIZABETH. (*Still reading:*) “And intended to provide for him in it. He would situate him at the family parsonage and provide a legacy of one thousand pounds. On my father’s death Mr. Wickham wrote to inform me that...

WICKHAM. I have resolved not to pursue a church living but to study law for which the thousand pounds would be insufficient. I hope you shall not think it unreasonable for me to expect more immediate pecuniary advantage.

ELIZABETH. “The business was soon settled. He resigned all claim to assistance in the church...”

WICKHAM. ...and accepted in return three thousand pounds. Three years later he applied to me again having found the law an unprofitable study and being then again resolved to be ordained.

ELIZABETH. (*Looking away from the letter:*) This must be false! This cannot be!

(Back to the letter.)

“He assured me his circumstances were...”

WICKHAM. ...exceedingly bad.

ELIZABETH. (*Away from the letter:*) Indeed on both sides this is only an assertion and yet every line confuses my belief in Mr. Darcy’s infamy.

(Back to the letter.)

DARCY. You will hardly blame me for refusing his entreaty and his resentment was so great...

WICKHAM. (*Direct to DARCY:*) You betray your father’s wishes and your own honour sir.

DARCY. ...that every appearance of acquaintance was dropped.

ELIZABETH. (*Reading:*) “Last summer he again, most painfully intruded on my notice. My sister Georgiana...

(She appears.)

for whom Mr. Fitzwilliam and myself were mutual guardians, was taken from school at her wish and established in London. Mr. Wickham by connivance recommended himself to her.

(WICKHAM approaches GEORGIANA.)

WICKHAM. Ah, Miss Darcy, it is my pleasure to renew your acquaintance.

ELIZABETH. “She was then but fifteen and was persuaded to believe herself in love and consented to an elopement.”

(GEORGIANA and WICKHAM kiss.)

DARCY. Fortunately, regarding me as almost a second father, she confessed her plans.

ELIZABETH. “You may imagine what I felt and how I acted.”

DARCY. I wrote to Mr. Wickham in undisguised heat and he left London immediately and alone.

(WICKHAM and GEORGIANA exit in different directions.)

DARCY. His chief object had unquestionably been my sister’s fortune of thirty thousand pounds and the hope, I think of revenging himself on me.

ELIZABETH. *(To herself:)* In this light his attentions to Miss King seem now the consequence of views solely and hatefully mercenary.

DARCY. *(Moves close behind ELIZABETH.)* This Madam, is a faithful narrative of every event. If your abhorrence of me should make my assertions valueless, I direct you to Colonel Fitzwilliam, also guardian of Georgiana who is fully aware of every particular described above.

ELIZABETH, DARCY. I will only add, God bless you.

(DARCY exits.)

ELIZABETH. *(Folds the letter.)* How humiliating is this discovery, yet how just a humiliation. Had I been in love I could not have been more wretchedly blind, but vanity, not love has been my folly.

(All the BENNETS appear behind her in tableau.)

As to the mention of my family in terms so mortifying, my sense of shame is severe but the charge strikes too forcibly for denial. Their defects I fear seem hopeless of remedy. My mother puts herself forward beyond all expectation while my father does nothing to restrain the uncontrollable giddiness and self-willed carelessness of my younger sisters. Only excepting dear Jane what can I call them all but ignorant, idle and vain.

(The family disappears, leaving ELIZABETH alone.)

How despicably I have acted! I who have prided myself on my discernment. 'Til this moment I never knew myself.

(Shift back into the BENNETS at Longbourn.)

MARY. I am glad you are back Lizzy.

LYDIA. Have you had any flirting? I was in great hopes you would have got a husband before you got back.

MARY. Our sisters have been more than ordinarily silly.

LYDIA. Oh poo. Aunt Phillips says Lizzy had better taken Mr. Collins; but I do not think there would have been any fun in it. Jane will be quite an old maid soon. Lord! How I should like to be married before any of you! And then I should chaperone you about to all the balls. Kitty and I have been to the shops.

KITTY. I do wish you had gone along with us Mary, for we had such fun. We talked and laughed so loud, that anybody might have heard us ten miles off!

MARY. Far be it from me, my dear sister, to depreciate such pleasures. But I confess they would have no charms for me. I should infinitely prefer a book.

LYDIA. Look here, I have bought this bonnet. I do not think it is very pretty; but I thought I might as well buy it as not.

MARY. *(To ELIZABETH:)* You see?

LYDIA. Oh, but there were two or three much uglier in the shop; and when I have bought some prettier coloured satin to trim it with fresh, I think it will be very tolerable.

(She exits with KITTY trailing.)

JANE. *(Quietly:)* Sister, I am heartily sorry that Mr. Darcy should have delivered his sentiments in a manner so little suited to recommend them, but I grieve for the unhappiness your refusal must have given him.

ELIZABETH. You do not blame me, however, for refusing him?

JANE. Blame you! Oh no. But Wickham so very bad! It is almost past belief. How unfortunate that you should have used such very strong expressions in speaking of Wickham to Mr. Darcy, for now they do appear wholly undeserved.

(JANE kisses her sister lightly and moves off as MRS. BENNET enters.)

MRS. BENNET. Well Lizzy, what is your opinion now of this business of Jane's?

ELIZABETH. My belief...

MRS. BENNET. He is a very undeserving young man, I don't believe she shall ever get him now.

ELIZABETH. Mamma...

MRS. BENNET. Well, my comfort is, I am sure Jane will die of a broken heart, and then he will be sorry for what he has done.

(LYDIA rushes in followed by KITTY.)

LYDIA. News! Ecstatic, delicious...

KITTY. Wonderful...

LYDIA. News!

KITTY. Hearing the regiment would leave for Brighton...

LYDIA. I thought my heart should have broken...

KITTY. My heart!

LYDIA. Mine! But, oh Mamma, I have received an invitation...

(MR. BENNET *enters.*)

LYDIA. From Mrs. Forster, the wife of the colonel of the regiment to accompany her to...

KITTY. Brighton.

LYDIA. To Brighton!

KITTY. And I cannot see why I should not be asked as well.

LYDIA. Shan't.

KITTY. Shall.

LYDIA. You confuse your steps to the Danse Espanõl and you've but one dress for the new season and that an unsuitable green.

(KITTY *offended moves away.*)

MR. BENNET. Lydia will never be easy 'til she has exposed her qualities in some public place or other, and we can never expect her to do it with so little expense or inconvenience to her family as under the present circumstances.

LYDIA. (*Embracing him:*) Oh, Papa!

ELIZABETH. Were you aware of the very great disadvantage to us all which must arise from the public notice of Lydia's unguarded and imprudent manner, nay, which has already arisen from it.

MR. BENNET. What, has she frightened away some of your lovers?

ELIZABETH. I have no such injuries to resent but, dear Father, if there is no check to her exuberant spirits she will soon be beyond the reach of amendment.

LYDIA. Oh poo.

KITTY. Yes, poo.

ELIZABETH. And Kitty will follow wherever Lydia leads.

LYDIA. Papa has said I may. Indeed a visit to Brighton comprises every possibility of earthly happiness.

ELIZABETH. Where you may play the common flirt with at least six officers at once.

LYDIA. (*In a spoiled fit:*) I tell you all I shan't dine or ever leave my room if...

MR. BENNET. We shall have no peace at Longbourn if Lydia does not go to Brighton.

MRS. BENNET. (*Returns with WICKHAM in tow:*) Mr. Wickham has arrived to say his goodbyes as the regiment tomorrow decamps for Brighton.

LYDIA. But Mr. Wickham I will not say *my* goodbyes for Papa has agreed I may accept Mrs. Forster's invitation for an extended visit.

WICKHAM. (*Kissing her hand:*) It will be my pleasure, if asked, to introduce you in Brighton and share the town's historical views.

(As he speaks MRS. BENNET signals the family that ELIZABETH and WICKHAM should be left alone and, in a trice, they are.)

WICKHAM. Miss Bennet.

ELIZABETH. Mr. Wickham.

WICKHAM. Am I in disgrace Miss Bennet?

ELIZABETH. I do not rightly understand you.

WICKHAM. I have always admired your understanding.

ELIZABETH. Have I mentioned I met Colonel Fitzwilliam and Mr. Darcy at Rosings? You know Colonel Fitzwilliam I believe?

WICKHAM. In passing: You saw Mr. Darcy frequently?

ELIZABETH. Yes, almost every day. I believe Mr. Darcy improves on acquaintance.

WICKHAM. Indeed! Is it in address he improves? For I dare not hope he is improved in essentials?

ELIZABETH. I mean that from knowing him better, his disposition was better understood.

WICKHAM. I must rejoice that he is wise enough to assume even the *appearance* of what is right, for it must deter him from such foul misconduct as I have suffered by.

(ELIZABETH, unable to suppress a smile, inclines her head as an answer.)

WICKHAM. But I fear I must leave you. We are on the march. A last word on Mr. Darcy. His manners being in a state of improvement may be imputed to his wish of forwarding with his new affability a match with the daughter of Lady Catherine de Bourgh. A match long contemplated by both families as a boon to the growth of their estates and the continuance of their honourable lines. Goodbye Miss Bennet, I am not sure we will meet again. I wish you good fortune in whatever way your inclinations lie.

(He exits. ELIZABETH moves downstage. Behind her, the BENNETS assemble in a living tableau as Longbourn is struck, leaving a bare stage except for one chair, in which MR. BENNET sits.)

ELIZABETH. The departure of the regiment, including many acquaintances, wrapped a cloak of gloom and disinclination around our domestic circle.

MRS. BENNET. *(Addressing the audience:)* Lydia has promised to write very often but her letters are always very short.

KITTY. Where such and such officers had attended them...

MARY. Where she had seen such beautiful ornaments as made her quite wild...

MR. BENNET. And how she had purchased another new gown and another new parasol.

ELIZABETH. And my constant hope of a tour to the lakes with the Gardiners was now the object of my happiest thoughts.

(The family exits. MRS. GARDINER enters to her.)

MRS. GARDINER. My dear Elizabeth our plans, due to Mr. Gardiner's business must be somewhat curtailed in extent. We must give up the lakes and substitute a more contracted tour. Had you set your heart on seeing the lakes?

ELIZABETH. Well, I own they were an attraction.

MRS. GARDINER. I fear we are confined to Derbyshire though it leaves us the delights of Warwick, Kenelworth, Lambton and, of course, Pemberley.

ELIZABETH. Oh, Pemberley.

MRS. GARDINER. The Darcy estate?

ELIZABETH. Yes, I recall.

MRS. GARDINER. If it were merely a fine house richly furnished I should not care about it myself, but the grounds are delightful.

ELIZABETH. *(Lost in thought:)* The grounds, yes. But is not the family down for the summer?

MRS. GARDINER. Indeed not, you goose, for they summer always in London. Elizabeth?

(A carriage is formed with a stool and the actors. Journey to Pemberley begins. A "carriage" pull-toy travels from stage right to stage left below the actors. The "Pemberley" pull-toy enters from stage left, pulled by the HOUSEKEEPER. ELIZABETH speaks first to us, and then enters the carriage.)

ELIZABETH. The journey was, for scenery splendid, and when we turned in at the lodge we saw that Pemberley Park was large...

MR. GARDINER. Contains quite a variety of ground.

MRS. GARDINER. Glorious woods.

MR. GARDINER. Eh?

MRS. GARDINER. Woods.

MR. GARDINER. Good stream for fishing.

ELIZABETH. The house sits well on rising ground.

(The GARDINERS agree.)

ELIZABETH. I own, I have never seen natural beauty so little contradicted by an awkward taste.

MR. GARDINER. *(To the horse:)* Whoa there, Alexander.

(A HOUSEKEEPER approaches, they exit the carriage. The stool is taken off.)

HOUSEKEEPER. You are very welcome. The master is, of course, absent but we expect him tomorrow, with a large party of friends. We are instructed always to show the house if you would like.

MRS. GARDINER. Most kind indeed.

MR. GARDINER. Your master much at Pemberley, is he?

HOUSEKEEPER. Not so much as I could wish sir.

MR. GARDINER. *(Detaching himself:)* Have a look at the stream, eh?

HOUSEKEEPER. Please to step in.

(ELIZABETH and MRS. GARDINER do so, by literally taking a "step.")

HOUSEKEEPER. That above the grand fireplace would be my master, drawn perhaps eight years ago.

MRS. GARDINER. A handsome face, but Lizzy you can tell us whether it is like or not?

HOUSEKEEPER. Does the young lady know Mr. Darcy?

ELIZABETH. I do.

HOUSEKEEPER. And do you not think him a very handsome gentleman, Ma'am?

ELIZABETH. Yes, very handsome.

HOUSEKEEPER. He is the best master as have ever lived. I have never had a cross word from him in my life.

ELIZABETH. Mr. Darcy, you mean?

HOUSEKEEPER. Yes Ma'am. Go as you please, see what you like.

(She departs.)

MRS. GARDINER. In what an amiable light does this place him, though not quite consistent with his behaviour to our poor friend.

ELIZABETH. It is possible we are deceived. Perhaps Aunt we may view the grounds.

MRS. GARDINER. Ah, with the greatest pleasure.

(They are now outside.)

Indeed, the landscape, the lawn, the river all in harmony with the buildings, I am quite swept away!

(DARCY suddenly appears.)

DARCY. Oh.

ELIZABETH. Oh.

MRS. GARDINER. Ah.

(An uncomfortable pause.)

DARCY. Miss Bennet, this is a...most welcome surprise.

ELIZABETH. Indeed...most welcome.

DARCY. May I enquire of your well being and that of your family?

ELIZABETH. In all regards...well.

DARCY. I am very pleased to hear so. Would you do me the honour of introducing me to your friends?

ELIZABETH. Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner may I present Mr. Darcy.

MRS. GARDINER. Charmed.

MR. GARDINER. Delighted.

ELIZABETH. My uncle and aunt.

DARCY. That, of course, only adds to the honour.

(ELIZABETH does a double take.)

MR. GARDINER. Wonderful stream Mr. Darcy, capital angling I suspect?

DARCY. Quite satisfactory Mr. Gardiner, should you continue in the neighbourhood please do me the pleasure of fishing here as often as you choose. I can easily provide the requisite tackle and

direct you to those parts of the stream where there is usually most sport.

MR. GARDINER. (*Hard of hearing:*) Eh?

DARCY. Best sport.

MR. GARDINER. Very generous, sir. Look forward to it.

ELIZABETH. (*A bit taken aback:*) Very generous indeed.

MRS. GARDINER. Please exempt our forwardness in walking the grounds. Your housekeeper informed us you would certainly not be here until tomorrow.

DARCY. I have preceded my party to arrange their comfort.

(*To ELIZABETH:*)

Among them are some who will claim acquaintance with you...Mr. Bingley and his sister, and one who more particularly wishes to be known to you. Will you allow me, or do I ask too much, to introduce my sister to your acquaintance during your stay at Lambton?

ELIZABETH. I am delighted by this compliment.

DARCY. Ah.

ELIZABETH. Yes.

MRS. GARDINER. Great pleasure.

(*DARCY, at a loss, bows and moves on. The "Pemberley" pull toy is struck offstage right by the HOUSEKEEPER.*)

MR. GARDINER. Perfectly well behaved, polite and unassuming.

MRS. GARDINER. There is something a little aloof in him. To be sure, Lizzy, he is not handsome but his features are perfectly good. How came you to tell us he was so disagreeable?

ELIZABETH. Well...

MR. GARDINER. Eh?

MRS. GARDINER. Disagreeable.

MR. GARDINER. Indeed not. At the worst a little whimsical in his civilities.

(Chairs and lap tables are brought on for MRS. GARDINER and ELIZABETH, who move down and “write” letters.)

MRS. GARDINER. My dearest daughter: The meetings and introductions suggested by Mr. Darcy took place two days following and excited my lively attention. I had conceived, you might say, a suspicion of Mr. Darcy and my niece which on that occasion grew to a full conviction that one of them at least knew what it was to love. Of Lizzy’s sensations I remained a little in doubt; but that the gentleman was overflowing with admiration was evident enough...

ELIZABETH. Thus, dearest Jane, in speaking of your supposed rival Miss Darcy I saw no looks between her and Mr. Bingley that spoke of particular regard. He also asked of me with great interest if *all* my sisters were still at Longbourn which I took to be an enquiry as to your married state. Miss Bingley continues in her dislike of me. Georgiana Darcy was greatly civil but very shy.

(MRS. GARDINER exits and the HOUSEKEEPER brings a letter to ELIZABETH.)

HOUSEKEEPER. Something come for you Miss.

ELIZABETH. Oh.

HOUSEKEEPER. Thought you might be wanting it.

ELIZABETH. News from Jane and very welcome.

(The chairs and lap tables are removed.)

HOUSEKEEPER. *(Exiting:)* Brought it to you then.

ELIZABETH. *(Reading. JANE appears.)* “Dearest Lizzy, something has occurred of a most serious and unexpected nature.”

JANE. Colonel Forster informed us that Lydia has run off to Scotland with one of his officers; to own the truth, Lizzy, it is with Wickham.

ELIZABETH. “Worse still...”

JANE. ...imprudent as a marriage between Mr. Wickham and our poor Lydia would be...

(MRS. BENNET appears. A chair for Elizabeth is brought on, as well as a chair and a writing desk for DARCY, who enters and writes at his desk.)

MRS. BENNET. We are now frantic to be assured it has taken place at all, for we now hear they are not gone to Scotland but to London!

JANE. And there is reason to believe...

ELIZABETH. That he never intended to marry Lydia at all...

JANE. And Colonel Forster...

MRS. BENNET. ...fears Wickham is not a man to be trusted!

JANE. Father is going to London with Colonel Forster to try to discover her, and what he means to do, I know not.

MRS. BENNET. He shall shoot the scoundrel through the heart and we shall all be ruined!

(Exits.)

JANE. Adieu! I cannot help earnest begging you...

JANE AND ELIZABETH. ...to come as soon as possible.

(JANE exits. ELIZABETH rises and rushes into DARCY.)

ELIZABETH. Oh! Where, where is my aunt? I must find her this moment on business that cannot be delayed.

DARCY. Good God, what is the matter?

ELIZABETH. I have not an instant to lose.

DARCY. I will send a servant, you cannot go yourself. A glass of wine; shall I get you one?

ELIZABETH. No...I...no...

DARCY. You are very ill.

ELIZABETH. No, I thank you. Only dreadful news. My younger sister has left all her friends, has eloped, under the power of...of

Mr. Wickham. You know him too well to doubt the rest...she is lost forever.

DARCY. I am grieved...shocked, but is it absolutely certain?

ELIZABETH. Certain. My father is gone to London and I am sure Mr. Gardiner will assist but how is such a man to be worked on, how are they even to be discovered?

DARCY. If there is anything...

ELIZABETH. Most kind but...

DARCY. Would to heaven that anything could be said or done on my part, that might offer consolation to such distress.

ELIZABETH. We must go at once. Pray apologize for us to Miss Darcy.

(She exits. MISS BINGLEY enters to DARCY.)

MISS BINGLEY. Dear me, your company seems to have fled the grounds in disarray.

(DARCY who was momentarily lost in thought.)

DARCY. Your pardon?

MISS BINGLEY. How very ill Eliza Bennet looked this morning, Mr. Darcy. I never in my life saw anyone so much altered as she is since the winter. She is grown so brown and coarse!

DARCY. It is, perhaps, no miraculous consequence of traveling in the summer.

MISS BINGLEY. *(She looks for agreement to DARCY. He remains silent.)* I particularly recollect your saying one night “*She* a beauty, I should as soon call her mother a wit.” But afterwards she seemed to improve on you. I believe you thought her rather pretty at one time?

DARCY. Yes, but that was only when I first knew her, for I now consider her the handsomest woman of my acquaintance.

MISS BINGLEY. Oh.

(DARY exits. MISS BINGLEY looks after him a moment as ELIZABETH moves down to the audience. MISS BINGLEY exits; Shift begins to Longbourn above ELIZABETH with the Bennet ladies and MR. GARDINER in attendance. MR. BENNET is missing.)

ELIZABETH. I had never perceived while the regiment was in Hertfordshire, that Lydia had any partiality for Wickham but she only wanted encouragement to attach herself to anybody. The mischief of neglect and mistaken indulgence towards such a girl! A family so deranged, a father absent, a mother incapable of exertion. And it is all my fault that knowing what I did of Wickham that I had not the foresight to make that knowledge public!

(ELIZABETH now enters into the scene with her family at Longbourn.)

ELIZABETH. Has anything been heard of the fugitives?

JANE. Not yet. But now that my dear uncle is come I hope all will be well.

ELIZABETH. Is Father in London?

JANE. Yes, he went on Tuesday.

MRS. BENNET. If I had been able to carry my point in going to Brighton with *all* the family, this would never have happened. Why did the Forster's let her out of their sight?

ELIZABETH. Mother...

MRS. BENNET. And now Mr. Bennet will fight Wickham wherever he meets him...I do not know what we shall do!

MR. GARDINER. Eh?

MRS. BENNET. Not know what we shall do?

MR. GARDINER. Ah. Do not give way to useless alarm. I shall go to London, calm my brother and consult together what is to be done.

(MR. GARDINER exits. MRS. BENNET, JANE, KITTY, MARY and ELIZABETH remain.)

MARY. This is a most unfortunate affair but we must stem the tide of malice and pour into the wounded bosoms of each other the balm of sisterly consolation.

KITTY. You see? Mary thinks it's all a book!

(MARY exits.)

JANE. Lydia wrote saying if we knew where she was going...

LYDIA. *(Appearing in the sky:)* You would laugh. What a good joke it will be when I write to Mama and sign my name "Lydia Wickham." I hope you will drink to our good journey.

(Disappears.)

ELIZABETH. Thoughtless, thoughtless Lydia! But at least it shows that she was serious in the object of her journey. Whatever he might afterwards persuade her to, it was not on her side a scheme of infamy. My poor father! How he must have felt it!

JANE. I never saw anyone so shocked. He could not speak a word.

MRS. BENNET. Mr. Bennet shocked? I was taken ill immediately. Indeed I had to be carried to my room...twice.

ELIZABETH. Oh Jane!

(They embrace. MR. BENNET enters.)

KITTY. Father!

MRS. BENNET. Mr. Bennet, dear Mr. Bennet.

ELIZABETH. Father, what you must have endured.

MR. BENNET. It has been my own doing and I ought to feel it.

ELIZABETH. You must not be too severe upon yourself.

MR. BENNET. No Lizzy, let me once in my life feel how much I have been to blame...or perhaps I will defer it 'til Kitty runs away.

KITTY. I am not going to run away, Papa. If I should ever go to Brighton, I would behave far better than Lydia.

ELIZABETH. Do you suppose them to be in London?

MR. BENNET. Yes, where else can they be so well concealed?

MARY. (*Re-enters:*) Father, from Uncle Gardiner in London.

(Hands him a letter.)

MRS. BENNET. (*To JANE:*) Indeed I have palpitations.

MR. BENNET. (*Reading:*) "I have seen them both!"

JANE. Thank heaven.

(MR. GARDINER appears above them.)

MR. GARDINER. They are not married nor can I find there was any intention of being so.

MRS. BENNET. Water!

(She is attended by JANE.)

MR. GARDINER. However I hope it will not be long before they are.

MRS. BENNET. Not long! See there, she is a good girl. Not long!

MR. BENNET. Hush, Mrs. Bennet.

MR. GARDINER. All that is required of you is, to assure your daughter, by settlement, her equal share of the five thousand pounds, secured among your children after your decease...

MR. BENNET. "...and enter into an engagement of allowing her, during your life, one hundred pounds per annum."

(MR. GARDINER exits.)

ELIZABETH. Is it possible? Can it be possible he will marry her?

JANE. So, Wickham is not so undeserving as we have thought him.

ELIZABETH. But the terms, I suppose, must be complied with.

MRS. BENNET. Exactly! You must write him on the moment, Mr. Bennet. They must marry!

MR. BENNET. And write I will, but there are two things I want very much to know...how much money your uncle has laid down to bring it about and how am I ever to pay him.

JANE. Money! My uncle! What do you mean sir?

MR. BENNET. I mean that no man in his senses would marry Lydia for a hundred a year during my life and fifty after I am gone. Wickham's a fool if he takes her with a farthing less than ten thousand pounds.

ELIZABETH. And Mr. Gardiner could pay such a sum?

MR. BENNET. Indeed he could not, nor I repay it.

MRS. BENNET. You must write Mr. Bennet, inscribe this minute! This is delightful indeed! She will be married! I shall see her again. My good, kind brother! I long to see her and dear Wickham too!

ELIZABETH. Dear Wickham?

MRS. BENNET. But the clothes, the wedding clothes. We must see to it. I will make the arrangements myself. Ring the bell, Kitty, we must have the carriage. My dear, dear Lydia! How merry we shall be together when we meet! Calico, muslin, cambric, I will manage it all!

(She rushes off. The stage picture rearranges to a new Longbourn configuration as the family prepares for the arrival of LYDIA and WICKHAM. KITTY moves downstage.)

KITTY. Mr. Gardiner wrote that Wickham had resolved on quitting the militia but would enter the regular army and under the command of General Trott now quartered in the north.

MARY. *(Moving down:)* After our sister's wedding day, the couple returned to Longbourn...

KITTY. ...and the family assembled to receive them.

(LYDIA and WICKHAM are revealed in a momentary tableau. It animates.)

LYDIA. Congratulate me sisters, it is a great while since I've been here. Good gracious! When I went away, I am sure I had no idea of being married though I thought it would be very good fun if I was. Dear Jane, I take your place now, and you must go lower because I am a married woman. And what do you think of my husband? Is he

not a charming man? All my sisters must go to Brighton now, as that is the place to get husbands.

ELIZABETH. I thank you for my share of the favour but I do not particularly like your way of getting husbands.

LYDIA. La! You are so strange. But I must tell you how it went off.

(WICKHAM leaves with MR. and MRS. BENNET. KITTY and MARY leave also. JANE and ELIZABETH are alone with LYDIA.)

LYDIA. We were married, you know, at St. Clements, because Wickham's lodgings were in that parish. And it was settled that we should all be there by eleven o'clock: well just as the carriage came to the door my uncle was called away on business and I was so frightened that the wedding must needs be put off but then I recollected Mr. Darcy would do as well to give me away.

ELIZABETH. Mr. Darcy!

JANE. Give you away?

LYDIA. Oh yes! He was to come there with Wickham you know. But gracious me! I quite forgot. I ought not to have said a word. It was to be such a secret.

JANE. If it was to be secret say not another word.

ELIZABETH. Most certainly, we will ask you no questions.

LYDIA. Indeed, for then I should tell all and Wickham would be so angry.

MRS. BENNET. *(Off:)* Lydia!

LYDIA. Coming Mamma.

(Exits. JANE and ELIZABETH exchange glances. JANE exits. Shift begins, striking Longbourn, leaving a bare stage. MRS. GARDINER and ELIZABETH are caught in the midst of a conversation.)

ELIZABETH. But are my suspicions concerning Mr. Darcy's actions correct?

MRS. GARDINER. Lizzie, really, if you are indeed so innocent and ignorant I must be more explicit.

ELIZABETH. Oh dear.

MRS. GARDINER. Mr. Darcy called to tell Mr. Gardiner he had found out where Wickham and your sister were. Mr. Darcy professed it was owing to himself that Wickham's worthlessness had not been well known. He called it his duty to step forward and remedy the evil caused.

ELIZABETH. But not brought on by himself. Lydia...

MRS. GARDINER. Lydia indeed. He called on her but found her resolved on remaining.

ELIZABETH. Lydia would be Lydia still.

MRS. GARDINER. Mr. Darcy asked why he did not marry your sister at once.

ELIZABETH. Because we are not rich.

MRS. GARDINER. Indeed Wickham still cherished the hope of making his fortune by marriage in some other country. Mr. Darcy then settled upon him a large sum for his acquiescence.

ELIZABETH. I knew it!

MRS. GARDINER. And made Mr. Gardiner acquainted with it. Lizzy, where are you going?

ELIZABETH. To speak with Father.

MRS. GARDINER. This must go, Lizzy, no further than yourself or Jane at most. Mr. Darcy wants neither the act or the sum known.

ELIZABETH. But you have told me.

MRS. GARDINER. *(Kissing her cheek:)* I have, yes.

(She exits. ELIZABETH turns to go and is hailed by WICKHAM.)

WICKHAM. Miss Elizabeth. I fear I interrupt your solitary ramble.

ELIZABETH. You do, yes.

WICKHAM. Ah.

ELIZABETH. But it does not follow that the interruption must be unwelcome.

WICKHAM. I should be sorry indeed if it were. I find from your aunt you have seen Pemberley.

(She nods.)

And you saw the old housekeeper, I suppose?

ELIZABETH. Yes.

WICKHAM. And what did she say?

ELIZABETH. That you were gone into the army and, she was afraid, had not turned out well.

WICKHAM. I see. Did Darcy introduce you to his sister?

ELIZABETH. He did.

WICKHAM. And do you like her?

ELIZABETH. Very much.

WICKHAM. I hope she will turn out well.

ELIZABETH. I dare say she will. She has got over the most trying age.

WICKHAM. You think ill of me, do you not Miss Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH. I am very glad you have married my sister, Mr. Wickham.

(A pause.)

How should you have liked making sermons?

WICKHAM. Exceedingly well, but it was not to be.

(An uncomfortable moment.)

I will leave you to your thoughts.

(He starts to go.)

ELIZABETH. Come Mr. Wickham, we are brother and sister, you know. Do not let us quarrel about the past. In the future I hope we shall always be of one mind.

WICKHAM. (*Kisses her hand.*) You are a generous spirit, sister.

(*He turns to go. LYDIA is suddenly there and ELIZABETH watches them depart together. MR. BENNET enters and crosses to ELIZABETH.*)

MR. BENNET. He is as fine a fellow as I ever saw. He simpers and smirks and makes love to us all.

MRS. BENNET. (*Entering:*) I often think there is nothing so bad as parting with friends. One seems so forlorn without them.

(*JANE enters.*)

ELIZABETH. This is the consequence, Madam, of marrying a daughter. It must make you better satisfied that your other four are single.

KITTY. (*Entering with a letter.*) Mr. Bingley is coming down Mamma.

(*MRS. BENNET takes the letter.*)

MRS. BENNET. Wonderful news!

(*Shift begins as Longbourn is reassembled.*)

MRS. BENNET. I mean...he is nothing to us and I am sure I never want to see him again. But he is welcome to Netherfield.

(*Looking at JANE.*)

MRS. BENNET. And who knows what might happen.

JANE. I assure you that the news does not affect me with either pleasure or pain.

MR. BENNET. If he wants our society let him seek it. He knows where we live.

MRS. BENNET. But you will wait on him, of course.

MR. BENNET. I will not spend *my* hours running after neighbours every time they go away and come back again.

(*KITTY moves down to look out over the audience.*)

JANE. I begin to worry that he comes at all. I could see him with a perfect indifference; but I can hardly bear to hear it thus perpetually talked of. My mother means well; but she does not know, no one can know, how much I suffer from what she says.

ELIZABETH. I wish I could say anything to comfort you, but it is wholly out of my power.

KITTY. (*Looking out:*) Mr. Bingley has entered the paddock and is riding toward the house.

ELIZABETH. (*To JANE:*) Do you contradict yourself with a smile of expectation?

JANE. Let me first see how he behaves, it will then be early enough for expectation.

KITTY. And there is a gentleman with him, Mamma.

MRS. BENNET. Some acquaintance or other, my dear, I am sure I do not know.

KITTY. La! It looks just like that Mr., what's his name—that tall proud man?

MRS. BENNET. Good gracious! Mr. Darcy! And so it does, I vow. Well, any friend of Mr. Bingley's will always be welcome here to be sure; but else I must say that I hate the very sight of him.

JANE. Ah.

(She looks at ELIZABETH.)

Mr. Darcy.

(DARCY and BINGLEY enter to the assembled BENNETS. MARY comes down to the audience.)

MARY. The gentlemen were received with tolerable ease and a propriety of behaviour I thought equally free from any symptom of resentment, or any unnecessary complaisance.

(The picture at the BENNETS is complete and MARY joins it.)

MRS. BENNET. It is a long time, Mr. Bingley, since you went away.

BINGLEY. Good gracious, yes. Far too long in my own opinion.

MRS. BENNET. I began to be afraid you would never come back again.

MR. BENNET. (*A warning:*) Mrs. Bennet.

MRS. BENNET. Miss Lucas is married and settled: and one of my own daughters.

BINGLEY. A matter for the greatest congratulation.

MRS. BENNET. It is a delightful thing, to be sure, to have a daughter well married. Mr. Wickham has taken her down to Newcastle with his regiment. A place too far northward, in my estimation.

BINGLEY. Indeed.

(A change of subject.)

Excellent shooting this season, eh Darcy?

MRS. BENNET. When you have killed all your own birds Mr. Bingley I beg you will come here and kill all of ours. You are a visit in my debt, Mr. Bingley, for when you went to town last winter, you promised to take a family dinner with us as soon as you returned. I have not forgot you see? I was very disappointed that you did not come back and keep your engagement.

BINGLEY. To be remedied at the first opportunity, eh Darcy?

MR. BENNET. You have been quite silent, Mr. Darcy, I hope you are well.

DARCY. Quite well.

(A pause.)

Very well.

MARY. (*To the audience:*) And then they went away.

(They do. The family exits leaving JANE and ELIZABETH alone.)

ELIZABETH. Why if Darcy came only to be silent, grave and indifferent, did he come at all?

JANE. Now that this first meeting is over, I feel perfectly easy. Obviously on both sides we met only as common and indifferent acquaintance.

ELIZABETH. (*Laughing:*) Oh Jane, take care.

JANE. My dear Lizzy, you cannot think me so weak as to be in danger now?

ELIZABETH. I think you are in very great danger of making him as much in love with you as ever.

(She turns to the audience.)

A man who has been once refused! How could I ever be foolish enough to expect a renewal of his love? Is there one among the sex who would not protest against such a weakness as a second proposal to the same woman? There is no indignity so abhorrent to their feelings.

(She moves upstage. KITTY moves down.)

KITTY. Mr. Bingley called again on Friday.

(He enters. A dumb show.)

ELIZABETH. (*To the audience:*) Having once set on this road to happiness there was nothing on the side of prudence to stop him or make his progress slow.

(BINGLEY leaves.)

KITTY. He called again on the following Tuesday.

(He enters. A dumb show.)

ELIZABETH. She was, of course, only too good for him but as nobody minds having what is too good for them, he was very earnest in the pursuit of the blessing.

(BINGLEY leaves.)

KITTY. And yet again Thursday a week.

(He enters and then leaves.)

MRS. BENNET. I begin to think there is something in this, Jane.

ELIZABETH. And it was not possible that encouragement from Jane should be long wanting.

KITTY. Mr. Bingley is come and he looks quite serious.

MRS. BENNET. Ah, Mr. Bingley...

(He enters.)

MRS. BENNET. What a memorable surprise.

(MRS. BENNET turns and winks at all the girls.)

KITTY. What is the matter Mamma? What do you keep winking at me for?

MRS. BENNET. I did not wink at you. Come Kitty, Mary, I want to speak to you.

(Takes them off.)

ELIZABETH. Mr. Bingley, you ride excellently. I—

MRS. BENNET. *(Returning:)* Elizabeth, I very much wish to consult you as to the...well, I want to talk to you.

(ELIZABETH is forced to leave with her mother.)

BINGLEY. My dear Miss Bennet...I say, might I venture your given name?

JANE. Indeed you might, if I might venture yours.

BINGLEY. Oh, smashing, top-of-the-hill really. My dear Jane, I wish to express how very great is my esteem for you.

JANE. I see.

BINGLEY. By heavens, esteem won't do, I must say affection I really must. Dear Miss Bennet, Jane...

(He kneels.)

If you would do me the honour of...

JANE. I will, and with a very full heart...but perhaps, before a fuller expression, you might prefer a word with my father.

BINGLEY. Your father. Well this is top-of-the-hill and no mistaking! I will speak with him, if available, this very moment. Promise me you won't move so much as a ribbon.

JANE. I will endeavour to be very, very still.

(He leaves.)

Oh dear.

(She explodes out of her chair.)

Lizzy!

ELIZABETH. *(Enters smiling:)* Lizzy what?

JANE. *(Falls into ELIZABETH's arms:)* 'Tis too much! By far too much. I do not deserve it. Oh why is everybody not as happy?

(MRS. BENNET enters.)

MRS. BENNET. A catch! A veritable catch, I am...ecstatic.

(MR. BENNET enters.)

MR. BENNET. You are a good girl.

(JANE goes to him for a kiss.)

MR. BENNET. I have not a doubt of your doing well together. You are each of you so complying, that nothing will ever be resolved; so easy, that every servant will cheat you; and so generous that you will always exceed your income.

MRS. BENNET. Exceed their income! My dear Mr. Bennet what are you talking of? Why he has four or five thousand a year and very likely more.

JANE. Oh Lizzy, why am I thus singled out from my family and blessed above them all? If I could but see you as happy!

ELIZABETH. If you were to give me forty such men I never could be so happy as you. 'Til I have your disposition, your goodness, I never can have your happiness. No, let me shift for myself and, perhaps if I have very good luck I may meet with another Mr. Collins in time.

MRS. BENNET. Indeed.

KITTY. (*Entering:*) Mamma, Mamma, I have no notion how to proceed, it is Lady Catherine de Bourgh come to call.

MRS. BENNET. No.

KITTY. Yes.

MRS. BENNET. I am astonished beyond all expectation!

(*LADY CATHERINE enters.*)

LADY CATHERINE. I have shown myself in.

MRS. BENNET. Well I...I...I...

ELIZABETH. You are very welcome Lady Catherine.

LADY CATHERINE. I hope you are well Miss Bennet. That lady I suppose is your mother?

ELIZABETH. Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet.

LADY CATHERINE. And these I suppose are your sisters?

MRS. BENNET. Yes Madam. My youngest of all is lately married and...

LADY CATHERINE. This must be a most inconvenient sitting room for the evening in summer: the windows are full west.

MRS. BENNET. Indeed we never sit here after dinner and...

LADY CATHERINE. (*To ELIZABETH:*) Miss Bennet, there seems to be a prettyish kind of little wilderness on one side of your lawn. I should be glad to take a turn in it, if you will favour me with your company.

(*Shift begins, striking Longbourn as bushes enter. We are on the grounds of the estate.*)

LADY CATHERINE. You can be at no loss, Miss Bennet, to understand the reason of my journey hither.

ELIZABETH. Indeed you are mistaken, I cannot account for the honour.

LADY CATHERINE. However insincere you may choose to be, you will not find me so. My character has ever been celebrated for

its sincerity and frankness. I was told, that not only your sister was on the point of being most advantageously married, but that you would, in all likelihood be united with my own nephew Mr. Darcy. Though I know it to be a scandalous falsehood I have arrived to make my sentiments known to you.

ELIZABETH. If you believed it untrue, I wonder you took the trouble of coming so far.

LADY CATHERINE. To have the report universally contradicted—can you declare there is no foundation to it?

ELIZABETH. Your ladyship may ask questions which I shall not choose to answer.

LADY CATHERINE. This is not to be borne.

ELIZABETH. Your ladyship has declared it impossible.

LADY CATHERINE. But *your* arts and allurements may, in a moment of infatuation, make him forget what he owes to himself and to all his family. You may have drawn him in.

ELIZABETH. If I have, I shall be the last person to confess it.

LADY CATHERINE. Miss Bennet, I am unaccustomed to such language as this. I am entitled to know all his dearest concerns.

ELIZABETH. But you are not entitled to know mine.

LADY CATHERINE. Mr. Darcy is engaged to my daughter. Now what have you to say?

ELIZABETH. Thus you have no reason to suppose he would make an offer to me.

LADY CATHERINE. From his earliest hours his mother and I planned the union and he is destined for his cousin.

ELIZABETH. But what is that to me? If there is no other objection to my marrying your nephew, I shall certainly not be kept from it by knowing his mother and aunt wished him to marry Miss de Bourgh.

LADY CATHERINE. Honour, decorum, prudence, nay interest, forbid it. Your alliance will be a disgrace; you have neither family,

connections nor fortune. Your name will never even be mentioned by any of us.

ELIZABETH. These are heavy misfortunes, but the wife of Mr. Darcy will have no cause to repine.

LADY CATHERINE. Obstinate, headstrong girl! I have not been in the habit of brooking disappointment.

ELIZABETH. *That* will make your ladyship's situation more pitiable; but it will have no effect on *me*.

LADY CATHERINE. Tell me, once and for all, are you engaged to him?

ELIZABETH. I am not.

LADY CATHERINE. And will you promise me never to enter into such an engagement?

ELIZABETH. I will make no promise of the kind. I must beg, therefore, to be importuned no farther on the subject.

LADY CATHERINE. Not so hasty, if you please. To the objections I have already urged I have another to add. I am no stranger to the particulars of your youngest sister's infamous elopement.

ELIZABETH. Lady Catherine—

LADY CATHERINE. A patched up business at the expense of your father and uncle.

ELIZABETH. I must ask you—

LADY CATHERINE. Is such a girl to be my nephew's sister? Is her husband, who is the son of his late father's steward to be his brother? Heaven and earth! Of what are you thinking? Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted?

ELIZABETH. You have insulted me in every possible method. I must beg to return to the house.

LADY CATHERINE. You are resolved to ruin him in the opinion of all his friends, and make him the contempt of the world against the claims of duty, honour and gratitude?

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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