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Cast of Characters

Women

MRS. BENNET
KITTY
MARY
LYDIA
JANE
ELIZABETH
MISS BINGLEY
MRS. GARDINER
HOUSEKEEPER

Men

MR. BENNET
DARCY
MR. BINGLEY
FITZWILLIAM

**For the ball scene another three or four couples would be helpful.*

Author's Note

It is, I think, apparent to all that Jane Austen's celebrated and much loved novel cannot be in any suitable way reduced to a thirty-five minute one-act play. What can be accomplished, I think, is to give young players and audiences a delicious taste of this wonderful book by focusing only on it's central relationship, retaining as much as possible of Miss Austen's own writing, and keeping the extraordinary mix of manners, comedy and love story that has for so long enchanted us. If at the conclusion of our labor we send everyone connected with the event happily back to the novel we will have accomplished much. Besides we will have seen Elizabeth and Darcy dance!

DARCY AND ELIZABETH

adapted by Jon Jory

FROM *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* BY JANE AUSTEN

(At lights up we hear the lush music of a waltz and two figures dancing. The two figures are, of course, DARCY and ELIZABETH. They dance beautifully and formally. Behind them in a tableau and barely lit are MR. BENNET and his other daughters: JANE, MARY, KITTY, and LYDIA. After perhaps fifteen seconds DARCY and ELIZABETH separate, bow and curtsy to each other and move away. DARCY exits and ELIZABETH moves up to join the Bennet family. MR. BENNET sits in an armchair. MARY sits reading. LYDIA stands examining her hair in a hand mirror. KITTY stands looking out an imaginary window. Just as DARCY and ELIZABETH separate, MRS. BENNET enters excitedly to the family group.)

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 has told me all about it.

MR. BENNET. *(Reading his paper:)* I see.

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

KITTY. How large a fortune?

MARY. Quiet Kitty.

LYDIA. Is he married or single?

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

MRS. BENNET. Bingley. And single, my dears. A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year!

(KITTY, MARY, and LYDIA rush downstage and say to the audience in concert...)

GIRLS. It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

(They then turn back up to rejoin the family.)

JANE. *(Laughing and shaking her head:)* For heaven's sake, sisters!

LYDIA. Oh poo, Jane.

MRS. BENNET. Isn't it a fine thing for one of our girls?

MR. BENNET. How so?

LYDIA. That he might marry one of us papa.

KITTY. Unless he be too proud.

MARY. Pride is a very common failing, I believe. By all that I 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.

KITTY. Well, too vain then.

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

MRS. BENNET. *(Trying to continue her thought:)* So, Mr. Bennet...

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

MRS. BENNET. *(Stares at MARY. Turns back.)* You must visit him, Mr. Bennet, as soon as he comes.

MR. BENNET. I see no occasion for that.

MRS. BENNET. You must go for it will be impossible for us to visit him if you do not.

MR. BENNET. I will send a few lines assuring him he may marry whichever of our daughters he chooses.

MRS. BENNET. Mr. Bennet!

MR. BENNET. Perhaps Elizabeth is in the mood to be married to-day, are you?

ELIZABETH. I should rather groom the field horses.

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

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

(The family circle freezes. JANE steps forward.)

JANE. Despite his protestations, Papa was among the earliest of those who waited on Mr. Bingley.

(The family breaks the tableau.)

LYDIA. Why must we all sit here in silence when we could be talking of Mr. Bingley.

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

MR. BENNET. *(Looking up from his paper:)* Indeed. If I had known as much this morning I certainly would not have called on him.

MRS. BENNET. Called on him?

LYDIA. Oh Papa!

(The girls gather around their father.)

MRS. BENNET. Now see what an excellent father you have girls.

(Kisses his cheek.)

But I knew I should persuade you at last.

(The actors quickly clear the furniture so the first ball may begin. Throughout the play, all scene changes are done by the cast. As to the ball, it may either be choreographed or the couples can simply position themselves in dance tableaux.)

LYDIA. *(Rushing downstage:)* There is nothing, nothing I love so very much as an assembly ball!

(Dance music. The couples form. DARCY and MR. BINGLEY, downstage, watch them.)

BINGLEY. Come, Darcy, I hate to see you standing about by yourself. You must dance.

DARCY. You know, Bingley, how I detest it unless I am particularly acquainted with my partner.

BINGLEY. But so many pleasant girls, and several of them uncommonly pretty.

DARCY. Your partner, the eldest Miss Bennet...

BINGLEY. *(Enraptured:)* Jane.

DARCY. Is the only handsome girl in the room.

BINGLEY. But there, see, her sister Elizabeth. Allow me to ask my partner to introduce you.

(DARCY not noticing that ELIZABETH is within listening range then says...)

DARCY. She is tolerable, but that is insufficient to tempt me.

(DARCY and MR. BINGLEY move away leaving a boiling ELIZABETH. JANE approaches.)

JANE. Do you not wish to be dancing sister?

ELIZABETH. I am found insufficiently tempting.

JANE. *(Puzzled:)* In what way?

ELIZABETH. But let's not talk of me. You, I see, have found an excellent partner.

JANE. Mr. Bingley is just what a young man ought to be. So much ease and such perfect good breeding.

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

JANE. Do you not notice that Mr. Darcy seems always to be on the fringes of your conversation.

ELIZABETH. Is he?

JANE. (*Suddenly pulling ELIZABETH over to him:*) Mr. Darcy, allow me to present my sister Elizabeth.

DARCY. Ah.

(*A pause.*)

A great pleasure.

(*ELIZABETH curtsies. JANE flees. A silence.*)

Ah.

ELIZABETH. (*Trying to find a subject:*) Did you not think Mr. Darcy, that I expressed myself uncommonly well in convincing Colonel Forester to give a ball in Meryton?

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

(*Pause.*)

Might I have the honor of your hand for the next dance, Miss Bennet?

ELIZABETH. I entreat you not to suppose my sister introduced us in order that I might beg for a partner.

DARCY. (*A touch coldly:*) As you choose.

(*He bows and moves away. ELIZABETH is left seething. DARCY crosses to MISS BINGLEY, Mr. Bingley's sister.*)

MISS BINGLEY. (*She likes him:*) Mr. Darcy.

DARCY. Miss Bingley.

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

DARCY. I should imagine not.

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

DARCY. Your conjecture is quite wrong. I have been meditating on the great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow.

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

DARCY. Miss Elizabeth Bennet.

(MISS BINGLEY is astonished.)

MISS BINGLEY. Really?

(He bows and moves away. The ball dissolves and we are returned to Longbourn. As you recall this is only a matter of setting chairs.)

ELIZABETH. *(To the audience:)* Soon enough at Longbourn, Jane found herself in receipt of an invitation from Miss Bingley.

JANE. *(Reading:)* 'My dear Miss Bennett, if you are not so compassionate as to dine with me today we shall be in danger of hating each other for the rest of our lives. We shall dine with my brother...'

ELIZABETH. You see?

JANE. 'As well as other gentlemen. Yours ever, Caroline Bingley.'

ELIZABETH. He has imposed on his sister that he may see you.

JANE. May I have the carriage father?

MRS. BENNET. No, no Jane. It would be far better to go on horse-back as the weather looks ill and you might have the good fortune to be thoroughly soaked and stay longer at the Bingley's in ill health.

ELIZABETH. *(To the audience:)* Mamma's hopes were answered, it rained torrents and Jane soon sent a letter.

(ELIZABETH unfolds it.)

My dearest Lizzy...

JANE. I find myself very unwell this morning and Mr. Bingley will not hear of my returning home 'til I am better.

ELIZABETH. *(To her parents:)* She feels ill and I will go to her.

(ELIZABETH leaves, the Bennets exit and JANE is pushed on lying on a chaise. MR. BINGLEY meets ELIZABETH.)

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

ELIZABETH. A pleasure Mr. Bingley, my sister's letter gave me some cause for concern.

BINGLEY. I will take you to her.

(*They move to JANE.*)

ELIZABETH. Jane, you are flushed.

MR. BINGLEY. I would be most grateful, Miss Elizabeth, if you would remain until your sister is quite well.

JANE. Mr. Bingley, I cannot attempt to thank you for your kindness.

MR. BINGLEY. Any thanks are far beyond the occasion, Miss Bennet. I have no pleasure greater than being of service to you.

(*He leaves. A card-table is being set up on another part of the stage.*)

ELIZABETH. (*Raising an eyebrow.*) Well...

JANE. He is most attentive.

ELIZABETH. Indeed he is.

(*The chaise is pushed off with JANE on it. MISS BINGLEY, MR. BINGLEY, and DARCY sit playing cards.*)

MISS BINGLEY. I have an excessive regard for Jane Bennet but with such a father and mother and such low connections she will only find a marriage with a farmer or a tradesman.

(*ELIZABETH enters.*)

MR. BINGLEY. Ah Miss Elizabeth, your sister improves I hope?

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

MR. BINGLEY. I say sister, would you perhaps take to the piano and play us a lively Scotch air.

DARCY. Splendid. And perhaps Miss Bennet will seize the opportunity to dance for us a fling.

ELIZABETH. You wish me 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. Thus I will not 'fling' and you may despise me if you dare.

MR. BINGLEY. (*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 own I laugh at follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies but I suppose those are precisely what you are without.

DARCY. 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 is sometimes justified. If I have the fault of pride it would be that 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 some natural defect, which even the best education cannot overcome.

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

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

LYDIA. (*To the audience.*) On Sunday the carriage was sent and Jane and Elizabeth returned home. Papa suggested a stroll to Meryton.

(They begin to walk.)

When we soon espied.

KITTY. A newly arrived officer of the regiment.

LYDIA. His appearance was greatly in his favor.

KITTY. He introduced himself as...

WICKHAM. Mr. Wickham. You are the Bennets I surmise. Much spoken of and all of it approbation.

(Turning to ELIZABETH.)

You are Elizabeth Bennet I believe.

ELIZABETH. I am.

WICKHAM. I solicit your further acquaintance Miss Bennet.

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

LYDIA. Just then Mr. Bingley and Darcy came riding by...

ELIZABETH. Mr. Wickham barely touched his hat and Mr. Darcy...

(They all look off at the imaginary riders.)

Coldly averted his gaze. Whatever could it mean?

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

(She curtsies flirtatiously to WICKHAM.)

WICKHAM. I am gratified to be asked, Miss Lydia.

LYDIA. *(Wickedly.)* We are five sisters so you will be sure to fall in love.

ELIZABETH. Lydia!

WICKHAM. I fear we poor souls in the army lack greatly in feminine instruction.

(LYDIA giggles. He turns to ELIZABETH.)

Miss Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. Mr. Wickham.

(He kisses her hand in a courtly manner and exits.)

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

(The stage clears except for ELIZABETH who speaks to the audience.)

ELIZABETH. When Mr. Wickham made good on his promise, he quite boldly suggested that I show him about the grounds.

(They sit on a bench.)

WICKHAM. May I say that I am personally delighted with your acquaintance.

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. I have, I fear, considerable knowledge of him. The elder Mr. Darcy, his father, was excessively attached to me. My father was his 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 sum of money to begin life as I wished. Both were countermanded by young Darcy after his father's death.

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

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

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

WICKHAM. Perhaps, 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.

LYDIA. *(Calling across the stage:)* Yoo hoo, Mr. Wickham!

ELIZABETH. Back at home Mr. Bingley had sent a personal invitation to us for the long-expected ball at Netherfield.

(The music begins. DARCY approaches ELIZABETH.)

DARCY. May I hope for the next Miss Bennet?

ELIZABETH. Well, I hardly think...

(Catching herself.)

Of course.

(They begin to dance.)

The music is well played do you not think?

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

It is your turn to say something now, Mr. Darcy.

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.

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.)

A Mr. Wickham.

DARCY. Mr. Wickham is blessed with such happy manners and 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 he is likely to suffer from all his life.

(A silence.)

DARCY. *(Changing the subject:)* What think you of books Miss Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH. I cannot talk of books, my head is full of something else. 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. May I ask to what these questions tend?

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

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.

(They move out of the dance and chairs are reset to create Longbourn.)

KITTY. *(To the audience:)* Not too long after the ball a letter of some import arrived at Longbourn for Jane.

(She delivers it.)

Sister, this has come from Netherfield.

(As JANE opens it:)

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

JANE. *(To ELIZABETH after she reads it:)* 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. She expresses here some hope for her own relationship to Darcy.

ELIZABETH. Foolishness.

JANE. No Elizabeth, it is clear enough. She neither wishes me to be her sister and is perfectly convinced of her brother's indifference to me.

ELIZABETH. I suspect, sister, that Mr. Bingley's regard for you was suppressed by his friend Mr. Darcy's interference.

JANE. Perhaps I have only imagined Mr. Bingley's regard. I think no ill of him or his sister. It was only an error of fancy on my side.

ELIZABETH. Really, you are too good. I have come to mistrust the consistency of all human character.

(JANE exits. ELIZABETH speaks to the audience.)

On the following Monday, Mrs. Gardiner, my mother's brother's good spirited wife arrived, to find me in very ill humor.

(MRS. GARDINER enters cheerily. ELIZABETH turns to her.)

MRS. GARDINER. You are pale Elizabeth, are you ill?

ELIZABETH. Not ill, but quite furious. I have a very poor opinion of young men altogether. Perhaps stupid men are the only ones worth knowing at all.

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

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

(Turns to audience. MRS. GARDINER departs.)

As I awaited with impatience my summer's escape to travels with my aunt, I was walking one day when I unexpectedly met with a friend of Mr. Darcy's.

(FITZWILLIAM enters.)

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

FITZWILLIAM. Miss Bennet. My pleasure. May I accompany you?

ELIZABETH. Please do. You visit with Mr. Darcy I assume?

FITZWILLIAM. We have been friends from childhood. And Mr. Bingley. You know him I would think.

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

FITZWILLIAM. I believe Bingley to be recently indebted to him. Darcy told me last evening that he had lately saved a friend from a most imprudent marriage, and I suspect Bingley's open nature might get him into a scrape of that sort.

ELIZABETH. You will pardon me, but what right has Darcy 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. Low connections, mercantile background, perhaps an unsuitable mother. Well, here is my turning. Good day to you, Miss Bennet.

(He exits.)

ELIZABETH. *(To herself. Furious.)* An unsuitable family.

(DARCY himself appears.)

DARCY. Miss Bennet.

ELIZABETH. Mr. Darcy.

DARCY. I had...had hoped I might encounter you. Would it be suitable if I...enquired of your health.

ELIZABETH. My health?

DARCY. As I have not encountered you these past days I thought it...suitable...to enquire of your health.

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

DARCY. Ah.

ELIZABETH. Yes.

DARCY. Ah.

(A silence.)

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:*) I...you...

DARCY. I see I dismay you. I know, I should have declared myself at an earlier date. But there were, of course, family obstacles... The general sense of your social inferiority... My way of life, a family history that might, given your circumstances, disinclude you. And thus my feelings grew against my will and reason, but I have found it impossible to conquer my feelings and I can only express the hope that these feelings will now be rewarded by your acceptance of my hand.

(*Holds it out.*)

There.

ELIZABETH. Mr. Darcy...I...in such cases as this it is the established courtesy to express one's thanks for the sentiment avowed however unequally they might be returned. But I cannot— I have never desired your good opinion and you have certainly bestowed it most unwillingly. I must leave you.

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

ELIZABETH. You told me, sir, that you liked me against your will and reason. But I have other provocations you know I have. Would I accept a man who has been the means of ruining forever the happiness of a beloved sister? You divided Mr. Bingley and Jane from each other thus 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 and thus save them both from an unsuitable marriage.

ELIZABETH. Quite clearly said. But it is not merely this affair on which my dislike is founded. The nature of your character was unfolded months ago in conversation with Mr. Wickham.

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

ELIZABETH. And who would not, knowing his misfortunes which are of your infliction. You have withheld the advantages owed him and thus dishonored your father's wishes.

DARCY. And this is your opinion of me. I thank you for explaining it to me so fully.

ELIZABETH. 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. Forgive me for having taken up so much of your time and accept my best wishes for your health and happiness.

(He exits.)

ELIZABETH. *(Turning to the audience:)* Has ever marriage been so proposed! Next morning I awoke to the same thoughts that had kept sleep so long at bay and sought air and exercise to clear my mind.

(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 honor of reading this letter?

(She takes the letter. He bows and moves upstage. She sits on the ground so he can be seen in back of her.)

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

(DARCY takes up the letter from behind her.)

DARCY. ...and the other that I had in defiance of honor blasted the prospects of Mr. Wickham.

ELIZABETH. 'I early observed my friend's surprising partiality to your sister.'

DARCY. She I also watched and though always correct, I could perceive no symptom of warm regard. She remained, to my eye, indifferent, which confirmed my sense that I must preserve my friend from further connection.

ELIZABETH. 'Bingley has a great natural modesty with a stronger dependence on my judgment than his own. To convince him he had

deceived himself was not difficult. On this subject I have nothing more to say and no apology to offer.'

DARCY. With respect to Mr. Wickham... My father was fond of the young man and said he would situate him as a churchman at the family parsonage and provide him a legacy of one thousand pounds.

ELIZABETH. 'On my father's death, Wickham wrote to say he would not pursue the church and one thousand pounds was inadequate to his plans.'

DARCY. A sum of three thousand pounds was settled but three years later he wrote again saying he found the law an unprofitable study and asked again for the family parsonage.

ELIZABETH. 'You will hardly blame me for refusing his entreaty but his resentment was great.'

DARCY. Last summer he happened to meet my younger sister Georgiana in London. She was but fifteen at the time and was persuaded to believe herself in love and consent to an elopement with him.

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

DARCY. His chief object was my sister's fortune of 30,000 pounds and the hope, I think, of revenging himself on me.

ELIZABETH. (*Folding the letter:*) How humiliating is this discovery, yet how just a humiliation. How despicably I have acted! I who have prided myself on my discernment. 'Til this moment I never knew myself.

(*DARCY exits. MRS. GARDINER enters to ELIZABETH.*)

MRS. GARDINER. So, Elizabeth, our summer travels now begin. As time is brief I fear we are confined to Derbyshire though it leaves us the delights of Warwick, Lambton and, of course, Pemberly.

ELIZABETH. (*Taken aback but interested:*) Oh, Pemberly.

MRS. GARDINER. The Darcy estate?

ELIZABETH. Yes, I recall.

(Two stools are set. MRS. GARDINER and ELIZABETH sit as if riding in the backseat of a carriage. ELIZABETH speaks to us as they travel.)

The journey was for scenery splendid and when we turned in at Pemberly Park...

MRS. GARDINER. There is not reason we may not stop Elizabeth, the family always summers in London.

(They step out of the carriage and are immediately surprised by seeing DARCY.)

DARCY. Oh.

ELIZABETH. Oh.

MRS. GARDINER. Ah.

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

ELIZABETH. Indeed, most welcome. May I present my Aunt, Mrs. Gardiner.

DARCY. Delighted.

MRS. GARDINER. Charmed.

(A pause.)

DARCY. Well...

ELIZABETH. Yes. Mr. Darcy, my sincere apologies for walking your grounds uninvited, we had assumed that you summered in London.

DARCY. I have preceded friends to arrange for the comfort of their visit.

MRS. GARDINER. Oh dear.

DARCY. But please, you will only add to my pleasure if you enjoy Pemberly freely for the duration of your visit. The weather is good and the grounds worth seeing.

ELIZABETH. Well...

MRS. GARDINER. We will. A generous offer.

(A HOUSEKEEPER brings a letter.)

HOUSEKEEPER. Beg pardon, Mr. Darcy. Might you be Elizabeth Bennet?

ELIZABETH. I would, yes.

HOUSEKEEPER. Letter brought by horse yesterday. Said Pemberly might be included in your trip.

ELIZABETH. How very strange.

HOUSEKEEPER. Rider said open immediately Miss. (To DARCY:) Pardon the interruption Sir.

(She leaves.)

ELIZABETH. (To DARCY:) Please excuse me.

(Reads.)

ELIZABETH. Oh no.

DARCY. You look quite pale Miss Elizabeth. Is something the matter?

ELIZABETH. The worst of news.

(Taking MRS. GARDINER's hand:)

We have not a moment to lose. My youngest sister, Lydia, has left all her friends and family and has eloped under the power of...of an officer...to own the truth it is with Wickham.

MRS. GARDINER. Oh no.

ELIZABETH. My mother is frantic to be assured a wedding has taken place at all and my father has gone to London to try and discover them...what he means to do I know not.

MRS. GARDINER. What little I know of George Wickham, he is not a man to be trusted.

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

ELIZABETH. Certain. How is such a man as Wickham to be worked on? How are they even to be discovered?

DARCY. Is there 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. (*Taking MRS. GARDINER's hand:*) We must go at once. (*To DARCY:*) Thank you sir, for your courtesy.

(*ELIZABETH moves center. DARCY and MRS. GARDINER exit. To the audience:*)

I never perceived while the Regiment was in Hertfordshire that Lydia had any partiality for Wickham but she only wanted encouragement to fall in with anybody. A girl so indulged! And it is all, all my fault that knowing what I did of Wickham that I had not the foresight to make the knowledge public!

(*ELIZABETH now enters Longbourn. Her mother sits dabbing her eyes. JANE stands at a window.*)

Jane. Mother.

JANE. Thank heaven you've come.

ELIZABETH. Has anything been heard of the fugitives?

JANE. Not yet.

MRS. BENNET. And your father has gone to London to find Wickham. He shall shoot the scoundrel through the heart and we shall all be ruined.

JANE. Lydia wrote that it would be a fine joke that when she next signs her name it would be Lydia Wickham.

(*MR. BENNET enters.*)

Father!

MRS. BENNET. My dear Mr. Bennet.

ELIZABETH. Father, what you must have endured.

MR. BENNET. Let me sit. What a business. What a terrible business. I have seen Wickham who indeed agrees to marry Lydia but

he wishes a settlement assured her of five thousand pounds and a yearly allowance of five hundred. How am I ever to pay him? How could I even borrow such a sum?

(LYDIA enters excited and proud.)

LYDIA. Father, Mother, sisters. Did no one hear the carriage.

ELIZABETH. Lydia.

LYDIA. Congratulate me sisters. 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.

MRS. BENNET. (*Delighted.*) You see, he has married her.

LYDIA. Of course I have Mother, it was all arranged once dear father agreed to the settlement.

MR. BENNET. Agreed?

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

ELIZABETH. Mr. Darcy!

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

(ELIZABETH looks at her astounded Father.)

ELIZABETH. If it was to be a secret we most certainly will ask you no questions.

LYDIA. Papa. Mama. I must change for dear Wickham has seen me in the same gown for three days.

(LYDIA exits. The room clears. ELIZABETH is left alone. FITZ-WILLIAM enters.)

ELIZABETH. (*To herself:*) What on earth are we to make of such a business.

FITZWILLIAM. Miss Bennet.

ELIZABETH. Colonel Fitzwilliam.

FITZWILLIAM. You will excuse my delaying you. I come from London with news of Mr. Darcy that might be of some interest to you.

ELIZABETH. What news?

FITZWILLIAM. My position is delicate. As a friend of Darcy's I should remain silent but at our last meeting I detected in you some doubts as to Darcy's character, which troubled me. May I speak frankly?

ELIZABETH. Yes please. Please do.

FITZWILLIAM. It concerns your sister's marriage. I feel rather like a bull in a china shop.

ELIZABETH. I will be grateful for any information you might give me.

FITZWILLIAM. Mr. Darcy asked me to accompany him to London to assist in finding Mr. Wickham and your sister. Mr. Darcy professed the business to be his fault for not making Wickham's worthlessness known to you. He called it his duty to step forward and remedy the evil caused.

ELIZABETH. But the evil done was in no way brought on by Darcy.

FITZWILLIAM. Of that he is not convinced. We managed to unearth the fugitives and he forthwith asked your sister to go with him but he found her resolved to remain with Wickham.

ELIZABETH. Lydia would be Lydia still.

FITZWILLIAM. Mr. Darcy took Wickham aside and demanded why he had not married your sister at once.

ELIZABETH. Because we are not rich.

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

ELIZABETH. I knew it!

FITZWILLIAM. I have vouchsafed you this information to, I hope, reestablish his reputation in your eyes. I believe him to be as honorable a fellow as I have ever known.

ELIZABETH. I thank you sir.

(WICKHAM enters from the other side of the stage.)

WICKHAM. Miss Elizabeth. Ah, I fear I interrupt you.

FITZWILLIAM. I must go.

(A bow.)

Miss Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. Colonel Fitzwilliam.

(He exits without speaking to WICKHAM.)

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

ELIZABETH. *(Carefully:)* I am very glad you have married my sister Mr. Wickham.

(He bows.)

WICKHAM. 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 exits. MR. BENNET enters. He and ELIZABETH look after WICKHAM.)

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

(He exits. JANE enters.)

JANE. Elizabeth, Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy have just arrived. Mama says they wish to see us...singly.

ELIZABETH. I can well imagine Mr. Bingley's purpose but Mr. Darcy's... There I am at a loss. Are you sure it is Mr. Darcy?

JANE. I am. Am I presentable?

ELIZABETH. Are you ever not?

JANE. I will greet them.

(The sisters hold hands for a second and then JANE exits.)

ELIZABETH. *(To the audience:)* A man who has been once refused! How could I even 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 exits. JANE and MR. BINGLEY enter.)

JANE. We were delighted, Mr. Bingley, to hear you had returned from London, will you be among us long?

BINGLEY. It is my hope, indeed my resolution to make Netherfield Park my permanent residence.

JANE. I see. I had assumed you preferred a city life.

BINGLEY. I find, Miss Bennet, that there are many things here in the country that I simply cannot do without.

JANE. I see.

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. 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...

**THIS PLAY IS
NOT OVER!**

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