

PRIDE & PREJUDICE

By Jane Austen

Adapted for the stage by Kirsty Budding

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Cast of characters (in order of appearance)

The Reverend
Parishioners
Mr Bennet
Mrs Bennet
Jane Bennet
Elizabeth (Lizzy) Bennet
Mary Bennet
Catherine (Kitty) Bennet
Lydia Bennet
Mrs Long
Lady Lucas
Hill
Servants
Dance Ensemble
Charlotte Lucas
Maria Lucas
Sir William Lucas
Mr Bingley
Mr Darcy
Miss Bingley
Mrs Hurst
Marianne Long (Mrs Long's niece)
Lucy Long (Mrs Long's niece)
First Footman (Smith)
Footmen Ensemble
Mr Collins
Captain Carter
Mr Denny
Mr Wickham
Colonel Forster
Mrs Forster
Anne de Bourgh
Mrs Jenkinson
Colonel Fitzwilliam
Mrs Gardiner
Mr Gardiner
Harriet Gardiner
Emma Gardiner
Louise Gardiner
Mrs Reynolds
Servant

Setting

Hertfordshire, London and Derbyshire, England, 1813

SCENE GUIDE

SCENE GUIDE		
ACT I		
Scene	Pages.	Characters
I: Church & Longbourn	1-8	Parishioners (in the audience), The Reverend, Mr Bennet, Mrs Bennet, Jane, Lizzy, Mary, Kitty, Lydia, Mrs Long, Lady Lucas, Hill, Servants
II: The Assembly – Mr Bingley & Mr Darcy	9-15	Dance Ensemble, Charlotte Lucas, Maria Lucas, Sir Lucas, Lady Lucas, Mrs Long and her nieces Marianne and Lucy, Mr Bingley, Mr Darcy, Miss Bingley, Mrs Hurst, Mrs Bennet, Jane, Lizzy, Mary, Kitty, Lydia.
III: Soundscape (pre-recorded)	16	The Bennet Family and Hill (pre-recorded) Jane Bennet appears on stage
IV: Netherfield – Jane’s Illness	17-20	Miss Bingley, Mrs Hurst Elizabeth, Mr Darcy, Mr Bingley, First Footman, Mrs Bennet and all Bennet daughters
V: Longbourn – Collins & Wickham	21-26	The Bennet Family, Hill, Mr Collins, Mr Denny, Captain Carter, Mr Wickham Mr Bingley, Mr Darcy
VI: The Netherfield Ball	27-31	Mr Bingley, Mr Darcy, Mr Collins, Captain Carter, Mr Denny, Miss Bingley, Mrs Hurst, The Bennet Family, the Lucas Family, Mrs Long and her nieces Marianne and Lucy, Dance Ensemble, Servants, Colonel Forster, Mrs Forster
ACT II		
I: The Proposal	32-35	Lizzy, Jane, Mr Collins, Mrs Bennet, Mr Bennet
II: Rosings Park	36-41	Mr Collins, Mrs Collins, Maria Lucas, Lizzy Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Mrs Jenkinson, Anne de Bourgh, Colonel Fitzwilliam, Mr Darcy
III: Mr Darcy speaks	42-43	Mr Darcy, Lizzy
IV: Pemberley	44-49	Mrs Gardiner, Mr Gardiner, Gardiner children: Harriet Gardiner, Emma Gardiner, Louise Gardiner, Lizzy, Jane, Mr Darcy, Georgiana Darcy, Mr Bingley, Miss Bingley, Mrs Hurst
V: Longbourn and Lydia	50-53	Gardiner children: Harriet Gardiner, Emma Gardiner, Louise Gardiner, The Bennet Family, Mrs Gardiner, Mr Collins
VI: Mr and Mrs Wickham & Lady Catherine	54-56	Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Lizzy, Mr Wickham, The Bennet family, Mrs Long, Hill
VII: Resolution	57-58	Mr Bingley, Mr Darcy, The Bennet family, Hill

ACT I Scene I: At Church and Longbourn

The REVEREND speaks to us, his congregation. PARISHIONERS kneel before him, the backs of their bonnets visible. Behind us, on the back row, are the BENNET FAMILY: MRS BENNET, MR BENNET, JANE, LIZZY, MARY, KITTY and LYDIA.

MRS LONG and LADY LUCAS and PARISHIONERS of Meryton sit in the audience. They have been greeting the audience as they arrive – just another Sunday at church in regency England.

REVEREND It is a truth universally acknowledged...*(beat, as if for dramatic effect)* that young women are prone to a love of pleasure and amusement that is quite ill-directed! *(LYDIA snorts and giggles; others Shhh her)* According to Fordyce's Sermons, young ladies can, through the development of their virtue, exclude the tendency to many, uh... *(uncomfortable)* temptations. *(begins to look awkwardly for a new page)*

KITTY AND LYDIA giggle.

MARY Kitty, Lydia: be quiet!

LYDIA Don't be dull, Mary.

MARY *(through gritted teeth)* We are in God's house!

KITTY I'd rather be in our house. At least there's a fire.

LYDIA And food. Lord, I'm so hungry.

KITTY Dear Lord give us food.

LYDIA And officers! *(giggling; the PARISHIONERS look back, distracted)*

LIZZY Shhh!

REVEREND *(finds the page; reads)* To prohibit young minds the perusal of writings is sometimes necessary. Happy indeed, beyond the vulgar story-telling tribe, and highly to be praised, is he who, with fine sensibilities and comprehensive views of men and manners, writes to the heart with simplicity and chasteness, through a series of adventures well conducted, and relating chiefly to scenes in ordinary life.

MRS BENNET *(in a whisper that can be heard by all)* Mr Bennet! Have you heard the news?

REVEREND *(looking at Mrs Bennet)* But female passions, naturally ardent, fly without previous examination—

MRS LONG *(whispering)* Netherfield Park is let at last!

REVEREND *(louder)* to every object which flatters that—

LADY LUCAS *(whispering)* A young man has taken it.

REVEREND --ardour by promising the vivacity of joy.

MRS BENNET (*whispering loudly*) A young man of large fortune! A single man—
PARISHIONERS (*whispering, at different times*) A single man of large fortune! A single man!
From the North of England! Five thousand a year!

The REVEREND closes Fordyce's Sermons with an impatient snap and the women fall silent.

REVEREND And that concludes Fordyce's Sermons. Let us pray.

MRS BENNET Ssshhh. Quiet, girls.

The REVEREND bows his head and the front row follows. For a moment, all is silent.

MRS BENNET (*beat*) Dear Lord, Thank you for sending us this man of large fortune from
the north of England.

MARY, LIZZY & JANE Mama!

Jubilant piano music. *The REVEREND and parishioners exit and the lights come up.*

The BENNET family make their way through the audience towards the stage on their walk home from church. On the way, MRS BENNET greets members of the audience.

MRS BENNET (*running after him*) Mr Bennet! Do you not wish to know who has taken it?

MR BENNET You wish to tell me, and I have no objection to—

MRS BENNET (*interrupting*) Why, my dear, Mrs. Long says that Netherfield is taken by a
young man of large fortune from the north of England! A single man, my
dear— (*distracted by a lady in the audience, she puts on exaggerated social
manners*) How do you do! What an interesting ensemble – is this a new
fashion from London? (*under her breath, to MR BENNET*) Ghastly. We must
order new clothes for the girls. I wonder what Mr Bingley will like.

LYDIA Bingley?

MRS BENNET Yes, Lydia. Mr Bingley! He has five thousand a year! We must move
quickly. (*waving to someone in the audience*) Hello madam! Good morning!
(*to the family*) You see the look in her eyes, Jane? She will set her cap at Mr
Bingley too!

JANE Mother, please. People are staring.

MRS BENNET Oh, let them stare!

LIZZY Mama, we have not yet met Mr Bingley! Must we have new clothes to
impress a man who may not be worth impressing?

MRS BENNET Lizzy, he has five thousand a year! When your father is dead, which may be
soon (*MR BENNET double takes*), we will have nothing if one of you does

not marry very well indeed. (*spots MRS LONG, far away amongst the audience*)

MRS LONG (*standing and waving*) Mrs Bennet! Mrs Bennet!

MRS BENNET (*shouts*) Mrs Long! I have just told the girls about Mr Bingley! Such exciting news!

MRS LONG (*shouting across the crowd*) Did you tell them he has five thousand a year?

MRS BENNET Yes, indeed!

MR BENNET Come, Mrs Bennet.

MRS BENNET (*to MRS LONG*) I will call tomorrow!

MRS LONG exits excitedly.

MRS BENNET (*continuing to MR BENNET*) – he came down on Monday in a chaise and four to see the place, and was so much delighted with it, that he took it immediately. You must visit him this afternoon— (*distracted by a lady who stands from her seat next to the aisle*) LADY LUCAS! (*Everyone shows their respect*) Have you heard the news? Netherfield Park is let at last!

LADY LUCAS Indeed. It was I who informed Mrs Long.

MRS BENNET Ah. (*her faux sweetness barely hides her sense of competition*) I am sure your daughter, Charlotte will be delighted to make Mr Bingley's acquaintance.

LADY LUCAS Indeed. That is certain, for Sir Lucas called on Mr Bingley this morning.

MRS BENNET He has already called? (*irritated; elbows MR BENNET*) Charming. Good day.

LADY LUCAS (*curtseys and smiles with a hint of smugness*) Good day.

LADY LUCAS exits.

MRS BENNET (*continuing on, resentfully under her breath*) Charlotte does not stand a chance against Jane.

LIZZY Mama! Charlotte is my friend.

MRS BENNET I know, Lizzy. But Charlotte is plain and twenty seven. I am certain Mr Bingley will not want a spinster.

LIZZY Mama!

MRS BENNET Oh, Mrs Bennet. What a fine thing for our girls!

They arrive upon a bright stage – the slightly worn drawing room of Longbourn.

Beyond the classical columns which frame the scene, a washing line is suspended holding dresses and chemises of the many women of the house. Beyond the washing line, evergreen trees and the countryside of Hertfordshire, England.

HILL, their housekeeper, takes their bonnets and cloaks as they continue their conversation.

MR BENNET How so? How can it affect them?

MRS BENNET How can you be so tiresome! You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them.

MR BENNET Is that his design in settling here?

MRS BENNET Design! Nonsense, how can you talk so! But it is very likely that he may fall in love with one of them, and therefore you must visit him immediately.

LYDIA *(to hill)* Is there cake?

HILL Yes, miss.

LYDIA and KITTY throw their things down and run for the cake. They start happily eating.

MR BENNET You and the girls may go, or you may send them by themselves, which perhaps will be still better, for as you are as handsome as any of them, Mr. Bingley may like you the best of the party.

LIZZY and JANE sit down sensibly, sharing looks at the follies of their mother. MARY goes to the piano and begins faintly playing a depressing tune.

MRS BENNET Mr Bennet, think of your daughters! Sir Lucas has already called on him! You know it will be impossible for us to visit him if you do not!

MR BENNET I will send a few lines by you to assure him of my hearty consent to his marrying whichever he chooses of the girls. They have none of them much to recommend them, they are all silly and ignorant like other girls; though Lizzy has something more of quickness than her sisters.

MRS BENNET I desire you will do no such thing. Lizzy is not a bit better than the others; and I am sure she is not half so handsome as Jane.

LIZZY I am right here, mama.

MRS BENNET Nor half so good-humoured as Kitty and Lydia.

LYDIA *(with a mouth of cake)* I'm the most funny!

KITTY And the most fat! *(LYDIA throws a small piece of cake; KITTY giggles)*

MRS BENNET And Mary is... *(MARY stares grimly)* a good girl. *(MR BENNET disappears ostentatiously behind a newspaper)* Oh! You take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion for my poor nerves.

MR BENNET *(lowering paper)* You mistake me, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these last twenty years at least. *(disappearing again)*

MRS BENNET *(shouting at the newspaper)* You do not know what I suffer! *(MARY plays a long-suffering tune on the piano - badly)*

MR BENNET *(shouting from behind it)* But I hope you will get over it, and live to see many young men of five thousand a year come into the neighbourhood.

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

MR BENNET *(lowering paper; he rolls it up and begins to exit)* Depend upon it, my dear, that when there are twenty, I'll visit them all. *(exits)*

MRS BENNET Ohhhh! *(chasing after him, exiting)* Mr Bennet! I beg you! *(fading into the distance)* Think of your daughters! Mr Bennet!

Left alone, JANE begins to make tea. MARY continues playing a sombre tune, and not well.

LYDIA Oh! Why is papa being so stubborn? *(distracted)* Mary, will you stop playing that dull music?

JANE *(kindly)* Come and have tea with us, dear?

MARY Very well. I cannot concentrate anyway *(pointedly at LYDIA and KITTY)* with all this commotion. *(MARY returns to the sitting area).*

LYDIA It is not our fault you take no interest in anything.

MARY I have many interests which are beyond your understanding.

JANE Please, do not argue. Let us sit and have tea together? *(MARY and LYDIA sit)* What do you think of all this, Lizzy? *(hands tea)*

LIZZY I suspect Papa is being mischievous. It does not matter in any case for we shall meet Mr Bingley at the assemblies, and Mrs. Long promised to introduce him. It is less than a fortnight.

LYDIA Aye! And I shall dance with Mr Bingley!

KITTY *(to LYDIA)* I should dance with him before you for I am two years older! You are not yet sixteen!

LYDIA It does not matter for I suppose he shall dance with Jane first. *(mimicking)* Oh, Jane is soooo handsome. *(standing on chaise)* Even more handsome than all her sisters put together! Including Lizzy!

LIZZY Lydia, get down!

KITTY *(copying LYDIA)* Ohh, the eldest Miss Bennet is the fairest of them all!

JANE *(holding out tea)* Won't you come down for some tea?

LYDIA *(sitting down)* It is lucky you are so kind Jane, or I might hate you.

LIZZY *(with good humour)* It is not Jane's fault she is the most handsome. In fact, I suspect it is rather a burden. *(LIZZY holds JANE's hand)*

JANE I do feel the responsibility most keenly. You heard Mama, if one of us does not marry very well, we will have nothing when Papa is gone. I should hate to fail you all.

LIZZY Oh, Jane. You are too sweet for your own good! If Mr Bingley turns out to be a miserable man of fifty, please do not marry him for our sakes.

LYDIA No indeed. Mary will have him. *(MARY glares, unamused)*

JANE I am relieved to hear you say that, Lizzy, for I should like to marry for love.

KITTY *(warmly)* That is sweet. *(matter-of-factly)* I should like to marry for money.

LYDIA All I ask is a handsome face and an officer's uniform. *(her sisters look questioningly)* A man looks nothing without regimentals.

LIZZY *(noticing MARY sitting quietly)* What about you, Mary?

MARY Duly considering the causes for which Matrimony was ordained. First, it was ordained for the procreation of children. Secondly, it was ordained as a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication.

LIZZY Barely noon and we have reached fornication. *(takes a sip of tea)*

JANE Let us hope that each of us finds happiness in marriage, as a blessing for ourselves and for the security of our family when Papa is gone.

LYDIA I do not understand. Why will we have nothing when Papa is gone?

LIZZY Lydia, you know the estate is entailed to Papa's cousin.

LYDIA Oh, yes. How silly.

KITTY Right unfair.

LIZZY I agree with you. But women cannot inherit, and as Papa has no son, one day we will have no home.

KITTY You mean, we will have to leave Longbourn?

LIZZY nods. The young women all think of this for a moment; we feel their love for Longbourn.

KITTY You had better wear a very nice dress to the assembly, Jane.

MARY According to Fordyce's Sermons, *(LYDIA and KITTY groan)* in matters of attire young women ought to join frugality and simplicity together, and never be fond of finery.

LIZZY That is a noble sentiment, Mary, but I fear Mr Fordyce has never been in the position of needing to attract a husband.

LYDIA and KITTY giggle. Suddenly MR BENNET and MRS BENNET can be heard approaching.

MRS BENNET *(offstage)* Sir William Lucas has already called! You have no compassion on my poor nerves!

MR BENNET and MRS BENNET enter.

MR BENNET I forgot to take a cup of tea to my library.

LIZZY *(standing to assist)* Allow me, father.

MR BENNET Thank you, Lizzy. You are always obliging and sensible. I am sure Mr Bingley will admire it.

MRS BENNET We are not to know what Mr. Bingley admires since you will not call!

ELIZABETH But you forget, mamma, that Mrs. Long promised to introduce him.

MRS BENNET Mrs. Long will do no such thing. She has two nieces of her own.

JANE Mama, she is your oldest friend!

MRS BENNET She is a selfish, hypocritical woman, and I have no opinion of her. No! Let us speak no more of it. I am sick of Mr. Bingley!

MR BENNET *(casually, stirring his tea)* I am sorry to hear that. If I had known as much this morning, I certainly would not have called on him.

The women all exclaim, except LIZZY who seems to have known all along, and MARY who seems never to have cared.

MRS BENNET You have called on him? But, Sir William Lucas—

MR BENNET Sir William arrived as I was taking my leave. It is very unlucky; but as I have actually paid the visit, we cannot escape the acquaintance now.

MRS BENNET squeals. She holds hands with KITTY and LYDIA and the three jump girlishly.

MRS BENNET Ahhhh! My dear Mr Bennet! What an excellent father you have, girls! And never to tell us, what an amusing joke! I knew all along, of course.

LYDIA Is he handsome?

KITTY Is he tall?

MR BENNET *(loudly, fleeing)* I will be in my library. *(exits)*

KITTY & LYDIA Wait, Papa! *(chasing after him, exiting)*

KITTY *(offstage)* What colour is his hair?

LYDIA *(offstage, into the distance)* Does he have strong arms? *(giggling)*

MRS BENNET *(approaching JANE affectionately)* Jane! Such wonderful news! Now you will be able to dance with Mr Bingley and make him fall in love with you and save us all from ruin! *(MRS BENNET fiddles with JANE's hair and dress)*

Let us go upstairs and make an inventory. We must prepare. In these circumstances, your father may be persuaded to let us purchase some new gloves and lace!

MR BENNET (offstage) No lace, Mrs Bennet!

MRS BENNET holds JANE's hand and leads exit. LIZZY follows. MARY remains sitting on the chaise.

MRS BENNET (offstage) And you, Mary! We must not give up hope!

MARY rises and follows with the enthusiasm of an eye roll.

*The stage empty, the **piano music rises** as HILL and SERVANTS enter and begin removing the tea things, taking the washing off the line, and lighting candles.*

The lights slowly come down as they work.

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ACT I Scene II: The Assembly Rooms

Jubilant, upbeat music – a country dance.

The lights come up on a large and happy DANCE ENSEMBLE dancing a merry dance in the local assembly room. It is the day of the anticipated assembly and ladies are excited to meet Mr Bingley.

The music ends, partners bow and curtsy, and groups move to pour drinks and talk.

MRS BENNET gossips in a corner with MRS LONG and LADY LUCAS.

LIZZY and JANE greet CHARLOTTE and MARIA LUCAS.

LIZZY *(rushing over)* Charlotte! Maria!

CHARLOTTE Lizzy! Jane.

LIZZY Any sighting of the famous Mr Bingley?

CHARLOTTE Not yet. Papa is preparing himself.

They look round with amusement to see SIR WILLIAM LUCAS quietly practising a bow.

Meanwhile, KITTY and LYDIA are standing in the green outdoor terrace, giggling and trying to catch a glimpse of MR BINGLEY arriving.

JANE Will Mr Bingley bring company?

MARIA Indeed! He is to bring twelve ladies and seven gentlemen!

CHARLOTTE I am sure it was five ladies.

LIZZY Too many ladies.

KITTY and LYDIA squeal and rush in.

LYDIA He is coming! We saw his carriage!

KITTY He is tall and handsome!

MRS BENNET *(rushing over)* Quick, girls!

MRS BENNET starts arranging her daughters, placing JANE at the front followed by LIZZY, KITTY and LYDIA. She forgets MARY, standing grimly in the background.

LADY LUCAS goes and brings her daughters to greet MR BINGLEY. MRS LONG arranges her nieces MARIANNE and LUCY.

MR BINGLEY enters with MR DARCY, CAROLINE BINGLEY and MRS HURST.

SIR WILLIAM LUCAS rushes forward. All bow.

SIR WILLIAM Mr Bingley! Welcome to our assembly!

MR BINGLEY Thank you, Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM I hope you have come eager to dance.

MR BINGLEY Indeed! You remember my sisters, Miss Caroline Bingley and Mrs Louisa Hurst. *(the ladies curtsey)* And my friend, Mr Darcy. *(Darcy bows a little)*

SIR WILLIAM You are very welcome! I imagine you often dance at St James'?

MISS BINGLEY No, sir.

SIR WILLIAM I am surprised! I was presented there, of course, *(proudly)* for my knighthood. *(BINGLEY'S sisters and MR DARCY look unimpressed)*

MR BINGLEY An honour indeed!

SIR WILLIAM *(airily)* I thought of fixing in town myself—for I am fond of superior society; but I did not feel quite certain that the air of London would agree with Lady Lucas. Do you not find the air troublesome?

MISS BINGLEY *(curtly)* The air is very clean in our part of London.

SIR WILLIAM Ah! Capital! Capital! Well, I have the pleasure of being able to introduce you to our most distinguished families! And *(meaningfully, to the men)* our young ladies! Mrs Long's nieces are eager to make your acquaintance *(MRS LONG'S NIECES MARIANNE & LUCY smile from a corner)*, and of course the Miss Bennets! *(indicates the Bennets standing afar)* Jane and Elizabeth Bennet are famous local beauties! *(bringing Charlotte forward)* And of course, my dear Charlotte, who is – well, my daughter.

MR BINGLEY *(kindly, as if responding to CHARLOTTE's discomfort)* If Miss Lucas is not engaged for the next dance, I would be honoured.

The music begins. *MR BINGLEY leads CHARLOTTE to the dance floor.*

MRS BENNET Charlotte Lucas! I suppose he is only being polite.

ELIZABETH Mother!

The dance begins. *During the dance, we see MR BINGLEY glance several times at JANE.*

The music concludes and everyone applauds.

We see MR BINGLEY speak with SIR WILLIAM, and they begin to approach.

MRS BENNET Look, girls! He is coming! Stand up straight! Smile!

SIR WILLIAM Mrs Bennet, Mr Bingley has expressed a desire to become acquainted with you and your daughters!

MRS BENNET How very kind. This is Miss Jane Bennet, my eldest, and often considered the most handsome. And Elizabeth, and Kitty, and my youngest Lydia.

ELIZABETH *(quietly)* And Mary.

MRS BENNET Ah, yes. And Mary you sit sitting over there.

MR BINGLEY I am very pleased to meet you. Mr Bennet did me the honour of calling. Is he not here this evening?

LYDIA He said he would rather die.

MRS BENNET *(elbowing LYDIA)* He is indisposed.

MR BINGLEY Ah. Well, if Miss Bennet is not otherwise engaged, would you do me the honour of dancing the next with me?

MRS BENNET *(interrupting before JANE can answer)* She would love nothing more!

JANE *(looking impatiently at her mother)* Thank you, sir. I would be delighted.

MR BINGLEY Excellent.

MR DARCY, MISS BINGLEY AND MRS HURST approach.

MISS BINGLEY *(looking at JANE with interest)* Charles, will you not introduce us.

MR BINGLEY Of course. Mrs Bennet, may I present my sisters Caroline Bingley and Louisa Hurst and my friend, Mr Darcy. Miss Bennet, Miss Elizabeth, Miss Catherine *(trying to recall)* and Miss Lydia Bennet.

MRS HURST How do you do.

MR BINGLEY Miss Bennet is doing me the honour of dancing the next with me.

MRS BENNET Jane is often asked to dance. I do not like to boast of my own child, but to be sure— one does not often see anybody better looking.

JANE *(embarrassed)* Mama, please—

MRS BENNET Do not be modest, Jane! It is what everybody says! *(to the group)* When she was only fifteen, there was a man at my brother Gardiner's in town so much in love with her that my sister-in-law was sure he would make her an offer before we came away. But, however, he did not. Perhaps he thought her too young. However, he wrote some verses on her, and very pretty they were too.

MISS BINGLEY, MRS HURST and MR DARCY stare, their horror matched only by JANE and LIZZY's embarrassment. The music begins.

MR BINGLEY Music!

ELIZABETH Thank God.

MR BINGLEY Shall we?

MR BINGLEY takes JANE's hand and leads her away. MISS BINGLEY and MRS HURST flee.

MR DARCY watches MR BINGLEY dance with JANE.

The lights come down on the mainstage.

The lights come up on a circle of trees wherein stand MISS BINGLEY and MRS HURST.

MISS BINGLEY *(fanning herself)* Lord, what a family.

MRS HURST *(fanning herself)* Did you hear the mother?

MISS BINGLEY Insufferable. I cannot think why Charles brought us here - to spend evenings in such low company!

MRS HURST Caroline, you are too severe! Did you not hear? *(ironically)* Sir William has a knighthood!

MISS BINGLEY Sir William was formerly in trade in Meryton!

MRS HURST The distinction has perhaps been felt too strongly! *(giggling)*

MISS BINGLEY Charles ought to have purchased an estate in Derbyshire.

MRS HURST Indeed. We might have been neighbours with Mr Darcy, and instead we have the Bennets!

MISS BINGLEY *(longingly)* Oh, for an estate as beautiful as Pemberley.

MRS HURST *(teasingly)* Perhaps you may one day live at Pemberley.

MISS BINGLEY *(smiling secretively)* I cannot think what you mean.

MRS HURST Can you not?

They giggle, then jump as MR DARCY enters. He is getting out a cigar.

MISS BINGLEY *(flustered)* Mr Darcy! Why are you not dancing?

MR DARCY You were both hiding on the terrace, and you know it would be a punishment for me to stand up with any other woman in the room.

MISS BINGLEY and MRS HURST giggle, self-satisfied.

MISS BINGLEY So none of the country ladies please you? Not even Miss Jane Bennet?

MR DARCY She smiles too much.

MRS HURST Or her sister? What was her name?

MISS BINGLEY Elizabeth Bennet. What do you think? A famous local beauty?

MR DARCY I should as soon call her mother a wit.

MISS BINGLEY and MRS HURST laugh. MR BINGLEY enters. The ladies curtsey and exit, echoing MR DARCY'S words with mirth.

MR DARCY smokes a cigar.

MR BINGLEY Come, Darcy. I must have you dance. I hate to see you standing about in this stupid manner.

MR DARCY I certainly shall not. Not at such an assembly as this.

MR BINGLEY I would not be so fastidious as you are for a kingdom! Upon my honour, I never met with so many pleasant girls in my life.

MR DARCY You have been dancing with the only handsome girl in the room.

ELIZABETH enters in the background, unseen. She begins to exit immediately, but stops at the sound of her name.

MR BINGLEY She is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld! But her sister, Miss Elizabeth Bennet; she is very pretty too, and I dare say very agreeable.

MR DARCY The one stood next to Miss Bennet? In the white dress?

MR BINGLEY Indeed!

MR DARCY *(thinks)* She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me. I am in no humour to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men. *(ELIZABETH reacts with offence, and exits)* You had better return to your partner and enjoy her smiles. You are wasting your time with me.

MR BINGLEY exits. MR DARCY continues smoking, looking thoughtful.

The lights go down on MR DARCY and come up on the stage.

MRS BENNET is gossiping with MRS LONG as MR BINGLEY returns to JANE's side. MRS LONG'S NIECES look put out.

KITTY *(running excitedly to MRS BENNET)* Mama! Where is Lizzy?

LYDIA We have such exciting news!

MRS BENNET She has gone out onto the terrace. *(the girls run)* Look, Mrs Long! *(pointing to JANE and BINGLEY)* They will be engaged in a fortnight!

LX: The lights come down on the stage and go up on the terrace, where MR DARCY still stands. LYDIA and KITTY run in shouting.

LYDIA The militia are coming!

KITTY A camp full of soldiers!

MR DARCY turns, baffled and appalled.

LYDIA Oh! (*giggling*) Sorry.

They giggle and exit, cackling. MR DARCY exits too, shaking his head.

LX: The lights come down on the terrace and return to the stage.

SIR WILLIAM accosts MR DARCY immediately.

SIR WILLIAM Mr Darcy! Why are you not dancing? It would be such a compliment to the place!

MR DARCY (*impatiently*) It is a compliment I never pay, if I can help it.

SIR WILLIAM Come! I am certain I can find a partner worthy of you! (*LIZZY moves past*) Miss Eliza! Mr. Darcy, you must allow me to present this young lady to you as a very desirable partner. You cannot refuse to dance, I am sure, when so much beauty is before you!

SIR WILLIAM goes to place LIZZY's hand in MR DARCY's, but she draws back.

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

MR DARCY I would be honoured, Miss Bennet.

ELIZABETH Thank you, but I am not inclined to dance.

SIR WILLIAM Miss Eliza! This gentleman dislikes the amusement in general, and yet wishes to make an exception!

ELIZABETH Mr. Darcy is all politeness.

MR DARCY You do not like to dance, Miss Bennet?

ELIZABETH Dancing is tolerable, but not amusing enough to tempt me. (*she curtsies with a slight smile and exits*)

MR DARCY gazes in surprise, and watches her go. He continues to stare long after she has gone.

SIR WILLIAM Well, I am sure someone will dance with you. Perhaps Miss Mary Bennet?

MR DARCY and SIR WILLIAM turn to look at MARY BENNET, who folds her arms. SIR WILLIAM moves away and MR DARCY continues to look thoughtful and a little surprised.

MRS HURST and MISS BINGLEY approach MR DARCY on either side.

MISS BINGLEY I can guess the subject of your reverie.

MR DARCY I should imagine not.

MISS BINGLEY You are considering how insupportable it would be to pass many evenings in this manner.

MRS HURST Indeed! I was never more annoyed! The self-importance of these people!

MR DARCY Your conjecture is totally wrong, I assure you. My mind was more agreeably engaged. I have been meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow.

MRS HURST looks delightedly at MISS BINGLEY, who looks equally excited.

MISS BINGLEY Tell us what lady has the credit of inspiring such reflections.

MR DARCY Miss Elizabeth Bennet.

The smiles of MRS HURST and MISS BINGLEY drop instantly.

MISS BINGLEY Miss Elizabeth Bennet!

MRS HURST He is joking!

MR DARCY I am not.

MISS BINGLEY Indeed! (*laughing, teasingly*) Pray, when can we wish you joy?

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

MISS BINGLEY Nay, if you are serious about it, I shall consider the matter is absolutely settled!

MISS BINGLEY and MRS HURST begin to depart.

MRS HURST You will have a charming mother-in-law!

MISS BINGLEY And of course, she will always be at Pemberley!

MR DARCY looks over at MRS BENNET, currently downing a glass of wine and shouting 'Smile, Jane, smile! And "So handsome!" (to no one in particular).

SFX: Thunder and lightning.

LX: Lights down, turn to blues as the Assembly guests exit and SERVANTS change the scene.

ACT I Scene III: The Invitation (pre-recorded sound)

SFX: The following audio track plays as the servants set up the scene for Netherfield

MRS BENNET Oh! my dear Mr. Bennet. We have had a most delightful evening! Mr. Bingley thought her quite beautiful, and danced with her twice! Only think of that, my dear: twice!

MR BENNET If he had any compassion for me, he would have sprained his ankle in the first dance.

MRS BENNET But Mr Darcy - What a proud, disagreeable man! He walked here, and he walked there, fancying himself so very great! He said Lizzy was not handsome enough to dance with!

LIZZY I may safely promise you never to dance with Mr Darcy.

MRS BENNET He is nothing to Mr Bingley!

KITTY Does no one care that the regiment is coming to Meryton?

LYDIA A whole camp full of soldiers!

HILL A letter has arrived from Netherfield!

JANE It is from Caroline Bingley! She invites me to take tea! May I have the carriage?

MRS BENNET No, my dear, you had better go on horseback, because it seems likely to rain; and then you must stay all night!

MARY That seems improper. According to Fordyce's Sermons—

KITTY & LYDIA Shut up, Mary!

Sound effect: thunder and lightning.

JANE BENNET enters, absolutely soaked. She stares out at the audience, shivering.

JANE MY DEAREST LIZZY, I find myself very unwell this morning, which, I suppose, is because I was wet through yesterday. My kind friends will not hear of my returning till I am better. They insist also on my seeing Dr Jones—therefore do not be alarmed if you should hear of his having been to me. Yours, etc., Jane.

JANE BENNET exits.

LIZZY I must go to Netherfield.

ACT I Scene IV: Netherfield

The lights come up on the luxurious interior of Netherfield. MISS BINGLEY, MRS HURST, MR DARCY, and MR BINGLEY are together after dinner. The ladies are playing cards, MR DARCY is staring out of the window, and MR BINGLEY is thinking of JANE.

LOUISA I shall never forget Elizabeth Bennet's appearance this morning! She really looked almost wild.

CAROLINE I could hardly keep my countenance. Very nonsensical to come at all! Why must she be scampering about the country, because her sister had a cold? Her hair, so untidy!

LOUISA Yes, and her petticoat; I hope you saw her petticoat, six inches deep in mud, I am absolutely certain.

BINGLEY I thought Miss Elizabeth Bennet looked remarkably well. Her dirty petticoat quite escaped my notice.

CAROLINE You observed it, Mr. Darcy, I am sure.

DARCY I did.

CAROLINE I am inclined to think that you would not wish to see your sister make such an exhibition.

DARCY Certainly not.

LOUISA To walk three miles, or four miles, or five miles, or whatever it is, above her ankles in dirt, and alone, quite alone! What could she mean by it?

CAROLINE It seems to me to show an abominable sort of conceited independence, a most country-town indifference to decorum.

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

CAROLINE I am afraid, Mr. Darcy, that this adventure has rather affected your admiration of her fine eyes.

MR DARCY Not at all. They were brightened by the exercise.

CAROLINE I think I have heard you say that their uncle is an attorney in Meryton.

LOUISA Yes; and they have another, who lives somewhere near Cheapside.

CAROLINE That is capital!

CAROLINE and LOUISA laugh.

BINGLEY If they had uncles enough to fill all Cheapside, they would be just as agreeable!

DARCY But it must lessen their chances of marrying well.

LOUISA Indeed!

ELIZABETH enters, carrying a book. MR BINGLEY and MR DARCY stand.

MR BINGLEY Miss Bennet. How is your sister?

LIZZY I am afraid she is quite unwell, sir.

MR BINGLEY You must stay as long as needed. Please, won't you join us.

LIZZY Thank you.

LIZZY sits down.

MRS HURST Would you like to play cards with us, Miss Bennet?

LIZZY Thank you, I prefer to read.

MISS BINGLEY Miss Eliza Bennet is a great reader, and has no pleasure in anything else.

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

MR BINGLEY In nursing your sister I am sure you have pleasure, and I hope it will soon be increased by seeing her quite well.

LIZZY Thank you sir, you are most kind. My sister asked me to convey her deepest thanks.

MR BINGLEY She is delightful!

MISS BINGLEY That reminds me, Mr Darcy, how is your delightful sister, Georgiana?

MR DARCY She is in good health, I thank you.

MISS BINGLEY I long to see her again! I never met with anybody who delighted me so much. Such a countenance, such manners!

MRS HURST And so extremely accomplished for her age! Her performance on the pianoforte is exquisite.

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

MISS BINGLEY All young ladies accomplished! My dear Charles, what do you mean?

MR BINGLEY I am sure I never heard a young lady spoken of for the first time, without being informed that she was very accomplished.

MR DARCY I cannot boast of knowing more than half-a-dozen who are really accomplished.

MISS BINGLEY Nor I, I am sure.

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

MR DARCY I do.

MISS BINGLEY Oh! Certainly. A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word.

MR DARCY And to all this she must yet add something more substantial.

LIZZY *(cheekily)* A large fortune?

MR DARCY *(beat, entertained)* The improvement of her mind by extensive reading.

LIZZY and MR DARCY have a moment.

The entry of the FIRST FOOTMAN breaks the silence.

FIRST FOOTMAN Mrs Bennet, Miss Bennet, Miss Bennet and Miss Bennet.

MRS BENNET, MARY, KITTY and LYDIA enter, looking around the room in awe. MISS BINGLEY and MRS HURST are displeased.

MR BINGLEY Mrs Bennet!

MRS BENNET Oh, Mr Bingley. My dear Jane! She is a great deal too ill to be moved. Mr. Jones says we must not think of moving her.

MR BINGLEY Moved? My sister, I am sure, will not hear of her removal.

MISS BINGLEY Miss Bennet will receive every possible attention while she remains with us.

MRS BENNET Excellent. *(starts moving around the room)* You have a sweet room here. I do not know a place in the country that is equal to Netherfield. You will not think of quitting it in a hurry, I hope.

MR BINGLEY I hope not. I like the countryside very much.

MRS BENNET *(to DARCY)* And you, sir?

MR DARCY The society is a little confined and unvarying.

MRS BENNET Confined and unvarying! The country is a vast deal pleasanter than town, yet you seem to think it nothing at all!

LIZZY Mama, you mistake Mr. Darcy. He only meant that there was not such a variety of people to be met with in the country as in town.

MRS BENNET Variety? I'll have you all know, we dine with four-and-twenty families!

MISS BINGLEY and MRS HURST stifle laughter.

LIZZY (weakly) Mama, have you seen Charlotte?

MRS BENNET Yes, she called yesterday with her father. What an agreeable man Sir William is! He has always something to say to everybody. That is my idea of good breeding; and those persons who fancy themselves very important and never open their mouths, quite mistake the matter.

LYDIA Mr Bingley, did you not promise to have a ball when you were settled?

MR BINGLEY Indeed! I am perfectly ready to keep my engagement; and when your sister is recovered, you shall name the date!

LYDIA Oh!

MRS BENNET How generous!

KITTY Perhaps Captain Carter and Mr Denny will come?

LYDIA Will the officers be invited?

LIZZY Lydia.

MR BINGLEY Of course.

MRS BENNET Captain Carter and Mr Denny are fine officers. They are often at Longbourn of late! And I must mention, Mr Bingley, that we will have one more in our party. Our cousin, the Reverend Mr Collins, arrives next week. Longbourn is entailed upon him and he wrote wishing to make amends to the girls.

MR BINGLEY Of course, he is most welcome.

MRS BENNET Mr Collins has the patronage of Lady Catherine de Bourgh. She is the daughter of an Earl. I imagine even you, Mr Darcy, could never dream of having such connections.

MR DARCY looks at MRS BENNET, baffled and amused at this statement – she clearly does not know that Lady Catherine is his Aunt. MRS HURST and MISS BINGLEY stifle laughter again.

MR DARCY Mrs Bennet, Lady Catherine is my Aunt.

MRS BENNET Ah. Indeed.

LIZZY buries her head in her hands. Lights down.

ACT I Scene V: Longbourn, Collins & Wickham

The BENNET FAMILY, less KITTY & LYDIA, stand waiting to receive MR COLLINS.

HILL enters.

HILL Mr Collins.

MR COLLINS enters.

MR BENNET Mr Collins. Welcome.

MR COLLINS Mr and Mrs Bennet! And your charming daughters! (*double takes*) I thought there were five.

MRS BENNET I'm afraid my youngest are delayed. They went into town to call on their friends.

MR COLLINS Unaccompanied?

MRS BENNET It is quite safe, Mr Collins.

MR COLLINS But for propriety – Fordyce's Sermons are clear on the question.

MR BENNET (*under his breath*) Oh, Lord.

MARY is immediately overcome with admiration for MR COLLINS.

MRS BENNET May I introduce my daughters – Jane, the eldest. Lizzy, and Mary.

LIZZY and JANE curtsy a little, whereas MARY curtsies to an absurd and distracting depth.

MR COLLINS How do you do. (*looking around*) What a fine room. It reminds me very much of a small summer breakfast parlour at Rosings Park.

MRS BENNET Indeed? (*sitting*) Rosings is the home of your patroness?

MR COLLINS (*not sitting, speaking with dramatic weight*) Lady Catherine de Bourgh. My dear cousins, you will scarcely believe it, but her ladyship's residence is separated from my humble abode only by a lane.

MR BENNET A lane? Fancy that, Lizzy.

LIZZY Is it a wide lane?

LIZZY and MR BENNET share a joke which goes over the head of MR COLLINS.

MR COLLINS *(earnestly)* No, indeed cousin, it is quite narrow. Perhaps only... *(he begins placing one foot in front of the other, pacing across the room)*. This wide. Still, wide enough to accommodate her ladyship's barouche carriage.

MRS BENNET I think you said she was a widow, sir? Has she any family?

MR COLLINS She has only one daughter, Miss Anne de Bourgh; the heiress of Rosings, and of very extensive property.

MRS BENNET And what sort of young lady is she?

MR COLLINS She is a most charming young lady indeed. I observed to Lady Catherine, that her charming daughter seemed born to be a duchess! You may imagine that I am happy on every occasion to offer those little delicate compliments which are always acceptable to ladies.

MR BENNET It is happy for you that you possess the talent of flattering with delicacy. May I ask whether these compliments proceed from the impulse of the moment, or are they the result of previous study?

MR COLLINS They arise chiefly from what is passing at the time, though I sometimes amuse myself with suggesting and arranging such little elegant compliments as may be adapted to ordinary occasions. But I always wish to give them as unstudied an air as possible.

MR BENNET Naturally. *(rising)* Well, Mr Collins, perhaps you would like to rest from your journey before dinner?

MR COLLINS Oh, I thought, perhaps, I might read to you all? *(The Bennets exchange glances; MR BENNET sits back down)* It is the benefit of a clergyman to bring light even to the darkest of places. *(MRS BENNET is affronted; COLLINS gets out a book)* Are you familiar with Fordyce's Sermons?

MARY *(passionately)* I am, sir.

MR COLLINS Good. *(creepily, to JANE)* I hope you will enjoy this, dear cousin. *(begins reading Fordyce's Sermons)* It is surely an Accomplished Woman, who possesses purity, meekness and modesty in her charms. Need I tell you, that men of the best sense have been usually averse to the thought of marrying a witty female. *(LIZZY and JANE are baffled. MARY mouths the words)*. You will probably tell me, they were afraid of being outshone; *(LIZZY assents)* but I am apt to believe, that many of them acted on different motives. Men who understand the science of domestic happiness, know that its very first principle is ease. We cannot be easy, where we are not safe. We are never safe in the company of a critic. But to suffer this restraint at home, what misery! *(All except MARY look miserable)* When that weapon is pointed at a husband, is it to be wondered if from his own house he takes shelter in the tavern? How have I pitied such a man, whose wife, in the run of her discourse, is guilty of petulance, or some indiscretion that would expose her and hurt them all—

KITTY and LYDIA burst into the room (shouting "Let's have cake / And music!") with three men: CAPTAIN CARTER, MR DENNY and MR WICKHAM.

LYDIA *(surveying the scene)* Lord, has someone died?

MR BENNET Not yet.

MRS BENNET Welcome, dears! This is your cousin, Mr Collins. Mr Collins, this is Kitty and Lydia and their friends, Captain Carter, Mr Denny and... *(looking at WICKHAM)* actually I do not know that one.

MR COLLINS is scandalised.

CAPTAIN CARTER Please allow me, mam. May I present George Wickham, he has just accepted a commission as an officer.

MR DENNY We are sorry to intrude; we did not know you had company. Lydia was quite insistent—

MR WICKHAM *(gallantly)* The fault is mine, madam. I thought it proper to escort these young ladies home, and when your daughters offered us the honour of making your acquaintance, I could not refuse.

MRS BENNET Oh! *(quite girlishly impressed by WICKHAM)* Well, we could hardly blame you for that. Hmm *(looking him up and down)* How tall you are. Ahem. This is Jane, my eldest, and Elizabeth, and Mary. And our cousin, Mr Collins. Oh, and Mr Bennet, of course.

MR WICKHAM *(bowing respectfully as the ladies curtsey)* How do you do.

KITTY *(clings to WICKHAM's arm)* Isn't he dashing?

LYDIA *(clings to his other)* So heroic!

MR BENNET Well, there is an unusually high number of young men in my drawing room. Madam, perhaps we might retire and leave the young people to themselves?

MRS BENNET *(a little disappointed)* Oh, very well. *(flirtatiously)* Goodbye, Mr Wickham. You are most welcome to call again.

MR COLLINS Mr Bennet, these ladies are without a chaperone?

MR BENNET I count on you, Mr Collins.

MR COLLINS takes the charge seriously. MR and MRS BENNET exit. The young people relax.

LIZZY Please sit down, gentleman. *(Everyone sits except COLLINS)*

JANE Mr Collins, won't you join us?

MR COLLINS If my fair cousin wishes it. *(sits between JANE and MARY, and smiles at JANE, oblivious to MARY'S attraction to him)*

MARY Mr Collins was just reading to us from Fordyce's Sermons. Do continue, Sir?

KITTY Oh, that sounds great – but actually Mr Wickham is eager to entertain us!

LYDIA Yes, he is a great _____ (musician / entertainer), is it not so Denny?

MR DENNY He is, mam. He entertains us all for hours at the tavern!

MR WICKHAM They are exaggerating my talents!

CAPTAIN CARTER Sadly, we are not. The ladies have little interest in us now that Wickham has come.

MR DENNY When he is in uniform, we will have no chance at all.

LIZZY (*playfully*) You are very popular, Mr Wickham. How do you bear it?

MR WICKHAM With a little discomfort! I was not intended for this life. The church ought to have been my profession. (*MR COLLINS snorts*)

LIZZY Really? I would not have guessed that.

LYDIA We need cake! Hill! (*exits shouting*)

LYDIA runs off looking for cake. KITTY starts handing out tea and chatting with DENNY and CARTER. MARY sits ostentatiously reading Fordyce's Sermons, trying to catch MR COLLINS' eye.

MR WICKHAM sits down next to LIZZY.

LIZZY (*politely*) Are you from this part of the country, Mr Wickham?

WICKHAM No, I grew up in Derbyshire.

LIZZY And how do you find Hertfordshire?

WICKHAM Charming. The people here are very welcoming and pleasant – like you. (*quietly, as if there is a sadness inside him*) Very different to the sort of people I have known in the past.

LIZZY Oh?

WICKHAM The truth is, I should at this time have been in possession of a most valuable living, but it was taken from me.

LIZZY How could that be?

WICKHAM I was raised by a gentleman of substantial means. He was my godfather, and excessively attached to me. He meant to provide for me amply, and thought he had done it; but when the living fell, his son would not honour it.

LIZZY But that is shocking! Did you not seek legal redress?"

LYDIA enters with HILL following with cake.

LYDIA Look, we have cake!

WICKHAM There was just such an informality in the terms of the bequest as to give me no hope from law. A man of honour could not have doubted the intention.

LIZZY Who was this man?

LYDIA *(interrupting impatiently)* Come on, none of this dull talk! Mr Wickham, play for us! / Entertain us!

ALL Yes, do!

WICKHAM Oh, but I am shy!

LIZZY Mr Wickham, after all these glowing reviews, we must see for ourselves.

WICKHAM *(flirtatiously)* Very well, if it please you, Miss Elizabeth Bennet.

MR WICKHAM entertains the room for a couple of minutes. In the Youth Cast, he will play classical piano. In the Mainstage class, he will perform magic (MR COLLINS must mumble 'Witchcraft')

MR WICKHAM has the ladies in rapture; they gather around him, transfixed and delighted.

MR BINGLEY and MR DARCY enter, preceded by HILL.

HILL Mr Bingley and Mr Darcy.

HILL speaks so quietly that no one notices the gentlemen enter.

MR DARCY registers the scene: MR WICKHAM surrounded by his many admirers, and closest to him ELIZABETH BENNET. MR BINGLEY coughs. JANE notices him.

JANE Mr Bingley!

ALL WOMEN Mr Bingley!

LYDIA And the other one—

LYDIA, KITTY & LIZZY Mr Darcy!

All compose themselves and bow or curtsey.

JANE I am sorry, Mama and Papa are resting. May I introduce our guests to you? Mr Bingley and Mr Darcy: our cousin Mr Collins, and Captain Carter, Mr Denny, and Mr Wickham.

BINGLEY How do you do.

CAPTAIN CARTER Sir.

DENNY Sir.

MR WICKHAM Sir.

The gentleman bow their heads. MR DARCY will not look at MR WICKHAM; he is full of anger.

JANE Won't you join us for tea, sir?

MR BINGLEY I do not wish to intrude; I should have called ahead. Had I known you had company—

JANE We did not know either. We have just made Mr Wickham's acquaintance. He plays so beautifully / He is wonderfully talented.

MR BINGLEY Perhaps you might entertain us at the ball at Netherfield, Mr Wickham?

MR WICKHAM I should be delighted.

MR DARCY now stares directly, confrontationally at WICKHAM. LIZZY notices DARCY's glare, but does not see WICKHAM'S glint of mischievous triumph.

MR BINGLEY I only came to thank Miss Lydia Bennet for her assistance in naming the day of the ball. My sisters are looking forward to entertaining you all.

LYDIA You are welcome, and thank you for including the officers!

KITTY Yes, we will be such a jolly party!

MR BENNET enters with a paper. Everyone looks round.

MR BENNET Ah, more men. I hope you have your eyes peeled, Mr Collins.

MR COLLINS They are wide, sir. Very wide.

MR BENNET exits.

Lights out.

Piano music

ACT I: Scene VI: The Netherfield Ball

The candles are lit and a piano is placed on stage for ladies to exhibit their accomplishments. In the youth cast, JANE BENNET, CHARLOTTE LUCAS, _____ and MARY BENNET play. In the mainstage cast, CAROLINE BINGLEY, _____ and MARY BENNET play.

MR DARCY, MR BINGLEY, the BENNETS, the LUCASES, all OFFICERS, MR COLLINS, MRS LONG and her nieces, and COLONEL FORSTER and MRS FORSTER, as well as the DANCE ENSEMBLE, gather to enjoy the music. When the first pianist concludes her piece, all applaud.

CAPTAIN CARTER leaves his group and approaches ELIZABETH.

CAPTAIN CARTER Miss Bennet. I have been asked to convey the sincere apologies of George Wickham. Unfortunately, business called him to town. Though, I do not imagine his business would have called him away just now, if he had not wanted to avoid a certain gentleman here.

LIZZY *(following Captain Carter's gaze)* Who? Mr Darcy?

CAPTAIN CARTER I believe Wickham told you about the man who denied him his inheritance?

LIZZY It was Mr Darcy?

CAPTAIN CARTER *(nods sombrely)* Good evening, Miss Bennet.

Music begins again: the next pianist. As they play, ELIZABETH talks with CHARLOTTE. On a different part of the stage, MRS BENNET is speaking to MR COLLINS. When the music ends and the applause comes, we hear their conversation.

MR COLLINS Music is an innocent diversion, I am confident, when in proper company. All clergyman must be attentive to such things.

MRS BENNET Indeed. *(fanning herself impatiently)*

MR COLLINS All clergyman must attend to matters such as propriety, education, and of course marriage. *(looks meaningfully at MRS BENNET)* Have I mentioned, Mrs Bennet, that the eldest Miss Bennet has many appealing qualities. *(he looks over at JANE)*

MRS BENNET Ah, Mr Collins! I am afraid she is likely to be soon engaged! However, Elizabeth, who is almost as pretty – she is quite free.

MR COLLINS Hmmmm. *(looks at LIZZY)* Yes, that is a fair alternative.

MARY BENNET goes to the piano. She plays and sings terribly. Everyone claps out of politeness, but then MARY goes to play another song. MR BENNET moves forward.

MR BENNET That will do extremely well, child. You have delighted us long enough. Let the other young ladies have time to exhibit.

MARY leaves the piano, embarrassed.

MISS BINGLEY Shall we have dancing?

Everyone cheers and a dance begins. MR COLLINS rushes over to LIZZY.

MR COLLINS My fair cousin, would you do me the honour?

LIZZY accepts, and is led to the floor. As they dance, (JANE with BINGLEY, LYDIA with DENNY), MR COLLINS stands out as a particularly poor dancer. MR DARCY looks on with amusement. The dance ends and MR COLLINS and LIZZY join MR and MRS BENNET, who are speaking to COLONEL FORSTER and MRS FORSTER.

MRS BENNET Colonel Forster, how much joy your officers have brought our girls!

COLONEL FORSTER I believe they have brought joy to our officers!

MRS FORSTER Indeed! Captain Carter and Denny would be lost without Kitty and Lydia!

COLONEL FORSTER I do not know how they will cope when the regiment goes to Brighton for the summer. *(MRS FORSTER nudges the COLONEL)*
Ah, yes. Mrs Forster had an idea. She will be in great need of a companion in Brighton.

MRS FORSTER It is comforting to have female company, as you can imagine.

COLONEL FORSTER Do you think Lydia might enjoy a summer by the sea, with your permission of course?

LIZZY Lydia? Living in a camp full of soldiers? I think she should enjoy it rather too much.

MRS BENNET Lizzy, hold your tongue! I am certain Lydia would have a wonderful time, Colonel. What do you say, Mr Bennet?

LIZZY Father.

MR BENNET If it pleases her. Lizzy, you know we will have no peace if we do not let her go.

MRS LONG approaches with her nieces MARIANNE and LUCY.

MRS LONG Colonel, may I present my nieces? Miss Marianne and Miss Lucy Long. *(they curtsy)*

LIZZY moves away from the group, quite frustrated with her family.

COLONEL FORSTER How do you do, ladies?
MRS LONG Do you think you can find them husbands?
MRS BENNET Really, Mrs Long! So tactless.

MARIANNE and LUCY move away from the group, embarrassed.

MARIANNE If our Aunt keeps trying to marry us to every man in the room, I shall have to leave!
LUCY Quite right, Marianne! We are not as unfortunate as she pretends. We are both handsome ladies!
MARIANNE But not as handsome as Jane Bennet. *(they look over at JANE admiringly. JANE is talking to MR BINGLEY, who is looking lovingly at her)*
LUCY Oh, to have a man who would look at me the way Mr Bingley looks at Jane Bennet.

LUCY and MARIANNE both sigh longingly. JANE leaves MR DARCY and approaches LIZZY.

JANE Lizzy, are you well?
LIZZY They are allowing Lydia to go to Brighton for the summer! Mrs Forster wishes to have a companion.
JANE Is that so very bad?
LIZZY Look at her. *(they look over at LYDIA, who is flirting with one of the officers, while MRS HURST and MISS BINGLEY judgementally observe)* You know what she is like.
JANE Calm down, Lizzy. What is the matter?
LIZZY Do you know why Mr Wickham is not here? Because Mr Darcy denied him his living! Old Mr Darcy intended for Wickham to have a valuable living in the church, but Mr Darcy did not honour it. I thought he was merely proud and disagreeable, but he is really cruel.
JANE Are you sure this is true? How could Mr Bingley be friends with such a man?
LIZZY He must also have been deceived.
MR DARCY *(appears suddenly)* Miss Elizabeth Bennet. Would you do me the honour of dancing the next with me?
LIZZY I... I had not... I thank you, yes. *(MR DARCY nods and moves away.)* Why could I not think of an excuse?

JANE Oh Lizzy, I am sure there is some explanation. He cannot be as cruel as you think.

LIZZY You think well of everyone, Jane. It is your greatest fault.

JANE returns to her group and speaks with MISS BINGLEY. The music begins and MR DARCY and ELIZABETH go to dance. They are alone, observed by all. They dance for a time in silence.

LIZZY I like this dance.

DARCY As do I.

LIZZY *(after more silence)* We must have some conversation, Mr Darcy. I remarked on the dance. Perhaps you might observe that private balls are much pleasanter than public ones.

DARCY Do you talk by rule, then, while you are dancing?

LIZZY It would look odd to be entirely silent, and this way we may say as little as possible.

DARCY Are you consulting your own feelings, or do you seek to gratify mine?

LIZZY Both. 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. I am not certain it captures mine.

LIZZY *(beat)* When you called the other day, we had just been forming a new acquaintance.

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. Some people, like myself, never forgive.

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

SIR WILLIAM Such very superior dancing is rarely seen! It is evident that you belong to the first circles. Allow me to say, however, that your fair partner does not disgrace you, and that I must hope to have this pleasure often repeated, especially when a certain desirable event take place! *(gestures to JANE and BINGLEY)* What congratulations will then flow in! Do carry on! Capital! *(he moves away, clapping)*

DARCY Sir William's interruption has made me forget what we were talking of.

LIZZY I do not think we were speaking at all. (*beat*) If you never forgive, then your resentment must be resilient indeed. You are very cautious, I suppose, as to its being created?

DARCY I am.

LIZZY And never allow yourself to be blinded by prejudice?

DARCY I hope not. May I ask to what these questions tend?

LIZZY I am trying to make out your character.

DARCY And what is your success?

LIZZY I hear such different accounts of you as to puzzle me exceedingly.

DARCY I wish that you would not sketch my character at the present moment.

LIZZY But if I do not take your likeness now, I may never have another opportunity.

DARCY I would by no means suspend any pleasure of yours.

They bow; the dance has ended. LIZZY walks away and is accosted by MISS BINGLEY.

MISS BINGLEY So, Miss Eliza, I hear you are quite delighted with George Wickham! Your sister has been asking me a thousand questions. He was the son of old Wickham, the late Mr Darcy's steward. Let me recommend you, as a friend, not to give confidence to all his assertions. George Wickham treated Mr Darcy in a most infamous manner!

LIZZY How so?

MISS BINGLEY I do not know the particulars, but I know very well that Mr. Darcy is not in the least to blame. I pity you, for this discovery of your favourite's guilt; but really, considering his descent, one could not expect much better.

LIZZY (*angrily*) His guilt and his descent appear by your account to be the same. I have heard you accuse him of nothing worse than of being the son of Mr. Darcy's steward, and he informed me of that himself.

MISS BINGLEY I beg your pardon. Excuse my interference—it was kindly meant.

MR COLLINS (*approaching*) My fair cousin!

LIZZY No thank you, Mr Collins! (*exits quickly*)

MR COLLINS (*chasing her offstage*) Cousin! Wait! Would you like me to read to you? I have Fordyce's Sermons in my trousers! Cousin!

The crowd watch MR COLLINS as he goes. MRS HURST, MISS BINGLEY and MR DARCY gather, discussing with concern MR BINGLEY's affection for JANE. JANE and MR BINGLEY dance together in the centre of the room, admired and oblivious. The lights fade down.

END OF ACT 1

ACT II: Scene I: The Proposal

At Netherfield, LIZZY sits with JANE, who is arranging flowers.

JANE Oh Lizzy! It has been a week since the ball and yet I feel as if it has been an age! Why do you think Mr Bingley has not called?

LIZZY Perhaps he is busy.

JANE Charlotte Lucas said I ought to make my affection more obvious. She said I should show more affection even than I feel in order to secure him.

LIZZY *(laughing)* Secure him? Charlotte is too pragmatic.

JANE But I fear I could never again meet anyone like Mr Bingley. He is just what a young man ought to be. Sensible. Lively. And I never saw such happy manners.

LIZZY He is also good looking, which a young man ought to be if he can.

JANE *(sincerely)* Lizzy, I love him.

MRS BENNET approaches with MR COLLINS.

MRS BENNET *(approaching, offstage)* I am certain there can be no objection! *(enters with MR COLLINS)* Ah, Lizzy! There you are. Mr Collins wishes to speak with you. Come along, Jane.

LIZZY *(to JANE)* Don't leave me.

JANE May I stay, Mama?

MRS BENNET Absolutely not! Come!

JANE leaves with MRS BENNET. LIZZY sits awkwardly as MR COLLINS clears his throat.

MR COLLINS Believe me, my dear Miss Elizabeth, that your modesty, so far from doing you any disservice, rather adds to your other perfections. You would have been less amiable in my eyes had there not been this unwillingness *(LIZZY looks baffled)*. You can hardly doubt my intentions.

(At various points, LIZZY tries to interrupt but is quieted)

My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman to set the example of matrimony in his parish; secondly, that I am convinced that it will add very greatly to my happiness; and thirdly—which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier, that it is the particular advice and recommendation of Lady Catherine de Bourgh. It was the very Saturday

night before I left Hunsford—between our pools at quadrille, while Mrs. Jenkinson was arranging Miss de Bourgh's footstool, that she said, 'Mr. Collins, you must marry. Choose properly, choose a gentlewoman for my sake; and for your own, let her be an active, useful sort of person, not brought up too high, but able to make a small income go a good way. Find such a woman as soon as you can, bring her to Hunsford, and I will visit her.'

And of course being, as I am, to inherit Longbourn after the death of your father, I could not satisfy myself without resolving to choose a wife from among his daughters.

And now nothing remains for me but to assure you in the most animated language of the violence of my affection. I look forward to expressing my affection most animatedly after we are married.

LIZZY You are too hasty, sir! You forget that I have made no answer. Thank you for the compliment. I am very sensible of the honour of your proposals, but it is impossible for me to accept them.

MR COLLINS Ah! I understand that is usual with young ladies to reject the addresses of the man whom they secretly mean to accept. I am therefore by no means discouraged.

LIZZY Upon my word, sir, I am perfectly serious in my refusal. You could not make me happy, and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who could make you so. Please pay me the compliment of believing what I say.

MR COLLINS I cannot believe you! My situation in life, my connection with Lady Catherine de Bourgh, are circumstances highly in my favour; and you should remember that it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made you. Your portion is unhappily too small to make you attractive.

LIZZY rises and exits. MR COLLINS calls after her.

MR COLLINS When I have the honour of speaking to you next on the subject, I shall hope to receive a more favourable answer! I know it to be the established custom of your sex to reject a man at the first proposal! (*composes himself*) Indeed.

MRS BENNET enters.

MRS BENNET Mr Collins? Where is Lizzy?

MR COLLINS I am afraid she has declined. Perhaps, if she is headstrong, she will not make me a suitable wife after all.

MRS BENNET (*shouts*) Lizzy! Mr Bennet! (*goes offstage, shouting hysterically*) Lizzy! Come back here and marry Mr Collins! Mr Bennet! Mr Bennet!

MR COLLINS sits down, awkwardly waiting as a conversation audibly takes place offstage.

MR BENNET Mrs Bennet, of what are you talking?

MRS BENNET Of Mr. Collins and Lizzy. Lizzy declares she will not have Mr. Collins, and Mr. Collins begins to say that he will not have Lizzy!

MR BENNET And what am I to do? It seems a hopeless business.

MRS BENNET Speak to Lizzy. Tell her that you insist upon her marrying him.

MR BENNET Lizzy. I understand that Mr. Collins has made you an offer of marriage. Is this true?

MR COLLINS nods as he listens.

LIZZY Yes, sir.

MR BENNET And this offer of marriage you have refused?

MR COLLINS nods again.

LIZZY I have, sir.

MR BENNET Very well. We now come to the point. Your mother insists upon your accepting it. Is it not so, Mrs. Bennet?

MRS BENNET Yes, or I will never see her again.

MR BENNET An unhappy alternative is before you, Elizabeth. From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents. Your mother will never see you again if you do not marry Mr. Collins... and I will never see you again if you do.

MR COLLINS stands in alarm.

MRS BENNET *(beat)* Oh, Mr Bennet!

MRS BENNET enters the room.

MRS BENNET Mr Collins!

MR COLLINS No, madam, I will take my leave. Only this morning, I received a dinner invitation from Sir William. I daresay my company will be more welcome at Lucas Lodge.

MR COLLINS exits.

MRS BENNET No sir! *(chasing him offstage)* No! Mr Collins! I have other daughters!

A moment later, JANE enters the drawing room holding a letter and crying. LIZZY follows.

LIZZY Jane? (*rushing to embrace her*) Jane, what is wrong?

JANE It is from Caroline Bingley. Mr Bingley and their party have all gone to London for the winter, and perhaps may never return.

LIZZY I cannot believe it.

JANE What do you think of this sentence (*points to one; LIZZY reads*) Is it not clear enough? Caroline is convinced of her brother's indifference to me and she means most kindly to put me on my guard. Can there be any other opinion on the subject?

LIZZY Yes! Miss Bingley sees that her brother is in love with you, but she wants him to marry Miss Georgiana Darcy. She follows him to town in hope of keeping him there, and tries to persuade you that he does not care about you.

JANE He will live in my memory as the most amiable man of my acquaintance, but that is all. I have nothing to reproach him with. This has been my own folly.

LIZZY My dear Jane! There are few people whom I really love, and still fewer of whom I think well. 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, and of the little dependence that can be placed on the appearance of merit or sense. But you Jane, in you I have faith!. (*They embrace; then LIZZY has an idea*) Jane, you remember our Aunt and Uncle Gardiner are coming soon?

JANE Yes.

LIZZY They have three energetic children... I daresay if you offered to assist in their education in London, our Aunt and Uncle would be most grateful.

JANE In London?

LIZZY A change of scenery may be just what you need. Who knows who you may see in town.

JANE Oh Lizzy, you are clever.

LIZZY So clever I just turned down a proposal from Mr Collins that would have secured our future.

JANE That was not clever, Lizzy; that was wise.

*Lights down. **Piano music.***

Act II: Scene II: Rosings Park

A spotlight comes up on MR COLLINS and CHARLOTTE LUCAS, side by side. The latter wears a wedding veil. During the recording, they act out an awkward, non-verbal scene. The following lines are pre-recorded, preceded by church bells.

LIZZY Charlotte has done what?

KITTY She has accepted a proposal from Mr Collins!

LIZZY Impossible!

MRS BENNET Charlotte Lucas! Mistress of this House!

LIZZY She must know she is marrying the stupidest man in England.

MRS BENNET What will become of us all! Mr Bennet, it is very hard to think that I should be forced to make way for her, and live to see her take my place in this house!

MR BENNET My dear, do not give way to such gloomy thoughts. Let us hope for better things. Let us flatter ourselves that I may outlive you.

CHARLOTTE My dear Lizzy. I know are you surprised, but I am not romantic; I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins's character, connection, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair as most people can boast on entering the marriage state.

LIZZY Charlotte... if it makes you happy, then I wish you all the best.

CHARLOTTE Thank you... but Lizzy. Will you promise me one thing? Promise me that you will come and visit us when we are settled.

LIZZY Will I finally meet the famous Lady Catherine de Bourgh?

CHARLOTTE I doubt you could avoid it, even if you wished to.

LIZZY *(laughing)* Yes, I will come.

The lights go down on MR and MRS COLLINS, and come up on the drawing room of ROSINGS PARK. In the centre, sits LADY CATHERINE DE BOURGH; next to her ANNE, her carer MRS JENKINSON, and LIZZY, and on the other side, MR COLLINS, MRS COLLINS and MARIA LUCAS.

MR COLLINS Allow me to compliment you, your Ladyship, on your very elegant arrangement in this room. Is it not marvellous, Mrs Collins?

MRS COLLINS Yes, indeed, your ladyship. Very elegant.

MR COLLINS The chairs – perfection! And the needlework on this cushion!

LADY CATHERINE My daughter, Anne. *(Anne bows her head)*

MR COLLINS Such accomplishment!

LADY CATHERINE Anne is often employed in needlework, as her indifferent state of health prevents her being in town.

MR COLLINS The British court is thus deprived of its brightest ornament! (*ANNE gives MR COLLINS a withering look, as if she despises him*)

LADY CATHERINE Mrs Jenkinson, Anne appears tired.

MRS JENKINSON Yes, your ladyship.

MRS JENKINSON stands and holds out her arm. ANNE takes it, and they exit.

LADY CATHERINE (*to MARIA*) Do you play and sing, Miss Lucas?

MARIA (*panicking to be spoken to*) Oh, uh, no, your ladyship. I mean, a little, but not really.

LADY CATHERINE You ought to have learned. The Miss Webbs all play, and their father has not so good an income as yours.

MR COLLINS Of course, your ladyship. I will pass on this important recommendation to Sir William. It may be too late for Maria, but he has a younger daughter who may benefit.

LADY CATHERINE (*to LIZZY*) And you, Miss Bennet. Do you play and sing?

LIZZY A little.

LADY CATHERINE Oh! then—some time or other we shall be happy to hear you. Our instrument is a capital one, superior to anything you have played before.

LIZZY Thank you.

LADY CATHERINE Do you have siblings?

LIZZY Yes, four sisters.

LADY CATHERINE (*to ELIZABETH*) And are any of your younger sisters out, Miss Bennet?

LIZZY Yes, ma'am, all of them.

LADY CATHERINE All! What, all five out at once? Very odd!

MR COLLINS Very odd!

LADY CATHERINE And you only the second.

MR COLLINS Odd, odd, odd.

LADY CATHERINE The younger ones out before the elder are married! Your youngest sisters must be very young.

LIZZY Yes, my youngest is not sixteen. Perhaps she is full young to be much in company. 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.

LADY CATHERINE Upon my word, you give your opinion very decidedly for so young a person! Are your sisters all at home?

LIZZY My eldest sister Jane is currently in London with my Aunt and Uncle, and my youngest sister Lydia is in Brighton with... a military regiment.

LADY CATHERINE A regiment!

LIZZY She is a companion to the Colonel's wife.

LADY CATHERINE Interesting. My nephew is a colonel. You will meet him presently; I believe he arrived this morning? (*looks to the FIRST FOOTMAN for confirmation, who nods*) He is resting after his journey. (*addresses the FIRST FOOTMAN*) Smith, go and see if the Colonel is up and inform him that I have company I would have him meet in the drawing room.

FIRST FOOTMAN Yes, your ladyship.

The FOOTMAN exits.

LADY CATHERINE Has your governess left you?

LIZZY We never had a governess.

LADY CATHERINE No governess! How was that possible? Five daughters brought up at home without a governess! If I had known your mother, I should have advised her most strenuously to engage one! I always say that nothing is to be done in education without steady and regular instruction, and nobody but a governess can give it. It is wonderful how many families I have been the means of supplying in that way. Four nieces of Mrs. Jenkinson are most delightfully situated through my assistance.

MR COLLINS Your ladyship's benevolence and generosity are second to none! Is it not so, Mrs Collins?

MRS COLLINS Yes, indeed. You are very generous.

MR COLLINS (*prompting his wife*) And benevolent.

MRS COLLINS (*with a hint of irritation at her husband*) And benevolent.

COLONEL FITZWILLIAM enters. He is a gentlemanly and warm person.

COLONEL FITZ Aunt!

LADY CATHERINE Colonel Fitzwilliam, you have met Mr Collins before of course. This is his wife, Mrs Collins and her sister Miss Lucas. And this, is Mrs Collins' friend, Miss Elizabeth Bennet.

COLONEL FITZ Miss Elizabeth Bennet! I have heard of you!

LADY CATHERINE Oh?

COLONEL FITZ I only mean, my cousin has mentioned you. He praised you very highly! He said you were the most witty and well-read woman he ever met. (*looks behind*) Ah, well now he is here and can speak for himself.

MR DARCY enters.

LADY CATHERINE Darcy! Well, this is a surprise. Smith did not mention you had come too. *(looks at the FIRST FOOTMAN, who hangs his head)* If I had known, I should have advised Anne to remain with us until dinner. No matter... I believe you are acquainted with some of my guests.

MR DARCY Indeed. Mr Collins, Mrs Collins, Miss Lucas... Miss Bennet. *(his eyes fix on LIZZY for longer than the rest)* Are you in good health?

LIZZY I am well, thank you sir.

MR DARCY Good.

LIZZY My eldest sister Jane has been in town these three months. Have you never happened to see her?

MR DARCY No, I have not had that pleasure. *(looks uncomfortable)* Forgive me, I have some urgent business.

MR DARCY exits.

LADY CATHERINE Anne will be most pleased to see Darcy again.

MR COLLINS Of course, your ladyship. It must give you great comfort to know that the intended are equal in rank and fortune!

LADY CATHERINE Precisely. Now Mrs Collins, would you do me the honour of joining me in the next room? I have a system of shelves I would show you; it will greatly improve your housekeeping at the parsonage.

MRS COLLINS Yes, your ladyship. *(following)*

MR COLLINS *(following)* We are eager to make all necessary adjustments your ladyship thinks necessary! Shelves! Shelves! What a sublime notion!

LADY CATHERINE, MR COLLINS, MRS COLLINS and MARIA exit.

COLONEL FITZ You are not eager to see the shelves, Miss Bennet?

LIZZY Shelves are not high on my list of interests.

COLONEL FITZ Pray, tell me more about your interest.

LIZZY Reading, walking, laughing, thinking, and sometimes singing. And you?

COLONEL FITZ The same. Precisely the same! I can tell we will be great friends!

LIZZY I hope so. How long are you staying at Rosings?

COLONEL FITZ As long as Darcy chooses. He arranges the business as he pleases.

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

COLONEL FITZ But so we all do. It is only that he has better means of having it than many others, because he is rich, and many others are poor. I speak as a younger son, well used to dependence.

LIZZY Dependence! You are the younger son of an earl – have you ever been prevented from going wherever you choose? I daresay you are even allowed to own property.

COLONEL FITZ You are right, Miss Bennet. Perhaps I cannot say that I have experienced many hardships. But in matters of greater weight, I may suffer from want of money. Younger sons cannot marry where they like.

LIZZY (*cheekily*) Unless they like women of fortune, which I think they often do. I know few such women myself. Perhaps only Miss Bingley.

COLONEL FITZ Ah yes. Her brother is a pleasant gentlemanlike man—he is a great friend of Darcy's. Indeed, I have reason to think Bingley very much indebted to him.

LIZZY How so?

COLONEL FITZ It is a circumstance which Darcy could not wish to be generally known, because if it were to get round to the lady's family...

LIZZY I will not mention it.

COLONEL FITZ Darcy told me that he congratulated himself on having lately saved a friend from the inconvenience of a most imprudent marriage.

LIZZY Did Mr. Darcy give you reasons for this interference?

COLONEL FITZ I understood that there were some very strong objections against the lady's family. Unsuitable, low connections, an embarrassing mother, and so forth. (*LIZZY does not respond*) Miss Bennet, are you quite well?

LIZZY Forgive me, I have a sudden headache. (*rises*)

COLONEL FITZ May I escort you?

LIZZY No, thank you. The walk will help, I think. Goodbye.

COLONEL FITZ Goodbye, Miss Bennet.

COLONEL FITZWILLIAM exits in the direction of LADY CATHERINE.

MR DARCY enters and looks around, unsure where everyone went.

He sits down and buries his head in his hands. Seeing ELIZABETH again has disturbed him, and he is more in love with her than ever.

ANNE (*offstage*) What is wrong, cousin?

MR DARCY looks offstage, and ANNE DE BOURGH enters. He stands.

MR DARCY Miss de Bourgh.

ANNE Please. We played together as children.

MR DARCY Anne.

ANNE sits down beside DARCY. ANNE, though sickly, is not what we would expect. She is smooth, realistic and her illness gives her a wider perspective on people and life.

MR DARCY Are you well?

ANNE No.

MR DARCY *(beat)* You know your mother wishes us to marry.

ANNE I am aware.

MR DARCY I cannot do it.

ANNE Good.

ANNE rises as if to leave.

MR DARCY Is that all? You are not angry?

ANNE What do you expect me to do? Cry?

MR DARCY *(faux offence)* No, but we have been betrothed since we were infants. I thought you might care a little.

ANNE The only reason I would marry you is to escape Mother. And to be mistress of Pemberley, of course. *(MR DARCY laughs)* I am afraid you will find all women have similar motivations. I suppose you wish to marry Miss Bennet?

MR DARCY *(shocked)* How do you know?

ANNE I did not suppose you came all this way to see me or Mother. I can see the attraction, and with your fortune, how could she say no?

MR DARCY *(smiles)* So, I have your blessing?

ANNE You have mine. Mother's however... *(she takes a cigar from DARCY's pocket)* It is your life, cousin. Live it. *(she puts the cigar in her mouth)*

ANNE exits. DARCY watches her go.

Act II: Scene III: Mr Darcy speaks

ELIZABETH is alone in the parlour at the parsonage. MR DARCY enters.

MR DARCY Good morning, Miss Bennet.

LIZZY Mr Darcy. *(They stare for a moment.)* Won't you sit down?

LIZZY sits. DARCY sits. Then MR DARCY stands again and walks about the room. He is agitated. He looks at LIZZY, and away, and back – trying to summon the courage.

MR DARCY In vain I have 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. *(beat)* Naturally, your family's low condition and connections are such that any alliance between us must be regarded as absurd. I have tried to repress my feelings but I cannot. I am here against even my own will. Miss Bennet, will you consent to be my wife?

LIZZY In such cases as this, the established mode is to express a sense of obligation, but I cannot. I have never desired your good opinion, and you have certainly bestowed it most unwillingly. I am sorry.

MR DARCY *(beat, and then angrily)* And this is all the reply I am to receive! I might, perhaps, wish to know why I am thus rejected!

LIZZY Do you think that any consideration would tempt me to accept the man who has been the means of ruining the happiness of a most beloved sister?

MR DARCY *(shocked, then impatient)* Colonel Fitzwilliam.

LIZZY Do you deny it?

MR DARCY I did everything in my power to separate my friend from your sister. Towards him I have been kinder than towards myself.

LIZZY How was it kind to separate them?

MR DARCY Do you expect me to flatter you and pretend that there are no obstacles?

LIZZY You mean my Uncle's living in Cheapside? Or the shame of my uncle being an attorney?

MR DARCY Do you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections? The situation of your family, though objectionable, was nothing in comparison to that total want of propriety so frequently betrayed by your mother, your three younger sisters, and occasionally even by your father!

LIZZY And what of your manners? From the very first, your manners impressed me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others. I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever marry.

MR DARCY You have said enough, madam!

LIZZY I have not finished! It is not merely this on which my dislike was founded. My opinion was decided months ago when I heard the story of Mr. Wickham.

MR DARCY Oh you take an eager interest in that gentleman's concerns!

LIZZY His misfortunes have been great!

MR DARCY His misfortunes!

LIZZY You took his living and reduced him to his present state of poverty!

MR DARCY You are wrong! *(beat)* Yes, my father left him a living in the church, but he declined it! He wanted the money instead! And I gave it! He took three thousand pounds and wasted it. For years, he lived an unsavoury life of idleness in town. And when he ran out of money, and I would not give him more, he... *(finding it difficult)*

My sister, Georgiana, who is more than ten years my junior, was left to the guardianship of Colonel Fitzwilliam, and myself. About a year ago, she was taken from school, to Ramsgate; and there also went Mr. Wickham, undoubtedly by design. Georgiana was persuaded to believe herself in love, and to consent to an elopement. She was then but fifteen years old.

Mr. Wickham's chief object was my sister's fortune of thirty thousand pounds. You may imagine what I felt and how I acted.

If you do not believe my account, Colonel Fitzwilliam can vouch for all that I have said. Thus, I hope you can at least acquit me of cruelty towards Mr. Wickham.

But as for the other charges against me, of pride and arrogance and of separating my friend from your sister: I make no apologies. Perhaps you might consider how your own prejudice led you to so easily accept Wickham's falsehood.

Good day, Miss Bennet.

MR DARCY exits.

Piano music.

Act II: Scene IV: Pemberley

MR and MRS GARDINER enter with their three children, HARRIET, EMMA & LOUISE, and JANE. They embrace.

HARRIET, EMMA & LOUISE Lizzy! Lizzy!

LIZZY Hello my little cousins! Harriet, look how you've grown!

HARRIET I am almost as tall as you!

LIZZY If you all run to the kitchen, Hill might find you something sweet!

ALL CHILDREN cheer and exit. LIZZY embraces JANE.

LIZZY Jane! How I've missed you! Uncle, Aunt.

AUNT GARDINER How are you, my dear? We hear you have been at Rosings Park.

LIZZY Indeed, but I did not enjoy it half as much as I will enjoy visiting the Lake Country with you!

UNCLE GARDINER I am afraid, Lizzy, that business in town will not allow me longer than a fortnight. We will have to content ourselves with touring Derbyshire.

LIZZY Oh, but Derbyshire is very beautiful, is it not?

AUNT GARDINER Indeed! I grew up there. It is the best place in the world. We will leave tomorrow morning.

UNCLE and AUNT GARDINER exit. LIZZY looks at JANE.

JANE Tell me all about Rosings!

LIZZY Well, Lady Catherine de Bourgh is awful, Mr Collins is still ridiculous, and Mr Darcy proposed to me.

JANE Proposed!

LIZZY I said no.

JANE Lizzy! I cannot believe it! He has loved you all this time!

LIZZY Yes, but let me tell you something first which is weighing on my mind. Mr Darcy confided in me that Mr Wickham tried to elope with his sister when she was just fifteen!

JANE How awful for Miss Darcy.

LIZZY But I wonder: do I have a duty to make his character known? At least among our acquaintance.

JANE What can be gained by making such a thing public?

LIZZY It involves Mr Darcy's sister. It would damage her reputation. No, I cannot.

JANE I agree.

LIZZY When you were in London, did you see Mr Bingley?

JANE Not once. I do not know how it is possible he did not know I was there. I suppose he is really indifferent.

LIZZY No! Jane, I learnt something while I was at Rosings... *(thinking)*

JANE What is it?

LIZZY Nothing. Just, do not give up hope. I remember how Mr Bingley looked at you! I still believe he loves you. *(embraces JANE)* I will miss you when I am walking in Derbyshire. You will write to me?

JANE Of course.

*Lights out. **Piano music.** The sound of birds chirping and the windswept country of Derbyshire.*

LIZZY, MR GARDINER & MRS GARDINER sit having a picnic.

MR GARDINER What a glorious day.

MRS GARDINER Are you enjoying yourself, Lizzy?

LIZZY Yes, very much. I love walking in the countryside, and the views here are beautiful.

MRS GARDINER There is another landmark we might visit before we leave. Pemberley. It is a great house only a mile from here.

LIZZY Oh, no. I know the owner; it would be too strange.

MR GARDINER I am sure Mr Darcy will not be home. Great men never are.

MRS GARDINER The housekeeper will only show us the main rooms.

MR GARDINER And there is a trout stream I am longing to see.

LIZZY *(beat)* Very well.

They walk towards PEMBERLEY and MRS REYNOLDS the housekeeper appears.

MRS GARDINER What a grand home! Have you ever seen such a thing, Lizzy?

LIZZY *(looking around, speaking to herself)* Of all this, I might have been mistress.

MRS REYNOLDS Welcome to Pemberley. I'm the housekeeper, Mrs Reynolds. If we walk this way, you can see the gallery. All the great portraits of the Darcy family hang here.

LIZZY Madam, may I ask if the family is at home?

MRS REYNOLDS Oh no, mam. The master is in town. We expect him back tomorrow. He is coming with a large party of friends, and Miss Darcy. Here is a portrait of her.

MR GARDINER A very handsome girl!

MRS REYNOLDS Indeed, sir! And so accomplished. She plays and sings all day long. (*indicating another portrait*) And this is my master.

MRS GARDINER Lizzy, is it a good likeness?

MRS REYNOLDS Does this young lady know Mr. Darcy?

LIZZY A little.

MRS REYNOLDS And is he not handsome, mam?

LIZZY Yes, very handsome.

MRS REYNOLDS I am sure I know none so handsome, or so kind. I have never known a cross word from him in my life, and I have known him ever since he was four years old.

LIZZY Really?

MRS REYNOLDS Indeed, mam.

In the background, MR DARCY appears out of the trees. He has just been swimming in the lake. He appears very casually or half-dressed, and when he sees ELIZABETH he tries to hide or escape.

MRS REYNOLDS But I have always observed, that they who are good-natured when children, are good-natured when they grow up; and he was always the sweetest-tempered, most generous-hearted boy in the world. Yes, Mr Darcy is truly a gentleman. Always so refined, and always so proper. And well-dressed, mam! A picture of order and decorum. Never a hair out of place. Shall we continue to the next room?

MRS REYNOLDS leads the way and MR and MRS GARDINER follow. LIZZY goes to join them but hears a noise and catches sight of DARCY.

LIZZY Mr Darcy!

MR DARCY Miss Bennet.

LIZZY The housekeeper said you were in town.

MR DARCY I came back early. (*looks at himself*) I went swimming.

LIZZY You have a... a weed in your hair.

MR DARCY (*feels for weed*) Ah, yes. It is a pond weed. The underwater... variety.

LIZZY Excuse me. MR DARCY Excuse me.

They walk and exit in opposite directions. LIZZY re-enters leading MR & MRS GARDINER.

LIZZY We must leave! What must he think of me!

DARCY enters ahead of them, pulling on a coat.

DARCY You are not leaving? Won't you introduce me to your friends?

LIZZY Of course. Mr Darcy, Mr and Mrs Edward Gardiner. They reside in Cheapside.

DARCY How do you do.

MR GARDINER How do you do, sir.

DARCY Mr Gardiner, do you care for fishing?

MR GARDINER I do, sir.

DARCY You must come and fish in my trout stream at any time.

MR GARDINER Thank you, sir.

MRS GARDINER How kind.

DARCY Might I introduce you to my sister? She is at home.

LIZZY Of course.

DARCY One moment. *(exits)*

MRS GARDINER Is this the proud Darcy you told us of?

MR GARDINER He seems very agreeable!

LIZZY I am as surprised as you are.

DARCY enters with his younger sister, MISS GEORGIANA DARCY.

GEORGIANA Miss Bennet! My brother has told me so much about you!

LIZZY Really? That makes me rather worried. May I introduce my Uncle and Aunt, Mr and Mrs Gardiner.

GEORGIANA How do you do. My brother and I would be honoured if you would join us for dinner. Would tomorrow evening be convenient?

LIZZY *(looks at Aunt and Uncle who assent)* We would be delighted, Miss Darcy.

Piano music: GEORGIANA, LIZZY, MR and MRS GARDINER exit and re-enter. They are joined by MISS BINGLEY, MRS HURST and MR BINGLEY. A SERVANT hands out glasses.

MR BINGLEY Miss Bennet!
LIZZY Mr Bingley!
MR BINGLEY Are you in good health?
LIZZY Yes sir.
MR BINGLEY And your family, are they in good health?
LIZZY Yes, sir.
MR BINGLEY And all your sisters are in good health?
LIZZY Yes, sir.
MR BINGLEY Your eldest sister, for example?
LIZZY Indeed, sir. Jane is very well, and still at Longbourn.
MR BINGLEY Wonderful. (*he moves away, thinking of JANE*)

MISS BINGLEY moves forward.

MISS BINGLEY Miss Bennet.
LIZZY Miss Bingley.
MISS BINGLEY I hear that the Militia are removed from Meryton, and now encamped at Brighton? That must be a great loss to your family. I recall certain ladies were particularly fond of the society of Mr Wickham.

GEORGIANA DARCY drops the silver goblet she is holding.

GEORGIANA Forgive me.

The SERVANT cleans up the mess.

LIZZY Mr Darcy, your silver is so well-polished it cannot even be held! I am afraid we do not have that problem at Longbourn. (*Everyone laughs.*) Won't you sing for us, Miss Darcy?
MISS DARCY I would much rather hear you sing!
MISS BINGLEY Yes indeed, I have never had the pleasure.
LIZZY Very well, if you insist.

ELIZABETH BENNET sings. MR DARCY watches her, captivated.

When she concludes, he escorts her to her seat; and side by side we see their mutual regard.

The lights come down and then up on the remaining guests: MR BINGLEY, MISS BINGLEY, MRS HURST & MR DARCY.

MISS BINGLEY How very ill Miss Eliza Bennet looked this evening, Mr. Darcy. I never in my life saw anyone so much altered as she is since the winter.

MRS HURST She has grown so brown and coarse!

MISS BINGLEY Louisa and I were agreeing that we could hardly recognise her. *(no response)* I must confess that I never saw any beauty in her. I remember, when we first knew her in Hertfordshire, how amazed we all were to find that she was a reputed beauty; and I particularly recollect your saying one night:

HURST & BINGLEY 'She a beauty!—I should as soon call her mother a wit.'

MISS BINGLEY But afterwards she seemed to improve on you, and I believe you thought her rather pretty at one time.

MR DARCY Yes, but that was only when I first knew her, for it has been many months since I have considered her as one of the handsomest women of my acquaintance.

The stage lights go down and a spotlight comes up on LIZZY, opening a letter. We see her face move from warmth to concern and anguish.

MR DARCY enters. LIZZY looks up with tears in her eyes.

MR DARCY Good God! what is the matter?

LIZZY I must find Mr and Mrs Gardiner immediately. We must leave.

MR DARCY Is there nothing you could take for your present relief? A glass of wine; shall I get you one? You are very ill.

LIZZY No, thank you, I am only distressed by a letter from Jane, with such dreadful news. My younger sister has left all her friends—has eloped; has thrown herself into the power of—of Mr. Wickham. They are gone off together from Brighton. You know him too well to doubt the rest. She has no money, no connections, nothing that can tempt him. My father has gone to London, and Jane has written to beg my uncle's immediate help. It is my fault. I might have prevented it – I knew what he was! Now it is too late. We must share in Lydia's ruin.

DARCY I am grieved indeed. Grieved—shocked. I fear this news will prevent you from being able to dine with us again this evening?

LIZZY Yes. Please convey my apologies to the party, especially to Miss Darcy.

DARCY I shall. *(bows)* Miss Bennet.

MR DARCY exits.

Act II: Scene V: Longbourn and Lydia

MRS GARDINER is speaking to her children, HARRIET, EMMA and LOUISE.

MRS GARDINER My dears, I must go to your Aunt Bennet. She is...

MRS BENNET (*offstage*) Sister! Brother! We are all ruined!

MRS GARDINER ... a little distressed.

MRS GARDINER exits.

EMMA Great. This is how we are to spend our holiday!

HARRIET Emma, where has cousin Lydia gone? Papa has gone to town to find her, but I don't understand how she got lost. Is London very big?

LOUISE Of course London is big, silly! And you are not allowed to know.

HARRIET I heard Papa say she has eloped. What does 'elope' mean?

EMMA 'Eloped' means they did not get married, silly. That means Lydia is in big trouble, because everyone knows only married people are allowed to go London. Or very rich people. Or people with big hats.

LOUISE Don't be ridiculous. 'Eloped' means they did not get married and our whole family is ruined because a woman's reputation is more important than anything. Haven't you seen Aunt Bennet crying and screaming upstairs with her smelling salts? (*Imitating Mrs Bennet*) Ohhhhh, Lydia. My dear girl! Why did you run away? Why did you not tell me? How can I help you find lace for your wedding dress when you're not here? (*Stops*) Never mind, we can always change our names and move to Australia.

EMMA I should hate to go there.

HARRIET Me too.

LOUISE Come on, let's go and play.

The lights come up on the stage. MRS BENNET is sitting in her nightclothes in an anxious state. MRS GARDINER is fanning her. KITTY, LYDIA, JANE and LIZZY stand by, sombrely.

MRS BENNET Oh sister! I hope Mr Gardiner will find them soon! I have not heard from Mr Bennet in days! Mr Gardiner must keep him from fighting Wickham, for if he dies then Charlotte Lucas will be mistress here! Tell Mr Bennet what a dreadful state I am in. And tell Lydia not to give any directions about her wedding clothes till she has seen me, for she does not know which are the best warehouses!

MRS GARDINER I am certain Mr Gardiner and Mr Bennet are doing everything in their power to find them and make them marry! Do rest, sister!

MRS BENNET drinks medicine, closes her eyes miserably and is quiet. MRS GARDINER exits.

LIZZY How could this have happened?

MARY *(beat)* Kitty knew.

KITTY I did not!

MARY She has a letter.

KITTY Shut up, Mary!

JANE A letter? From Lydia?

LIZZY Show me. Kitty!

KITTY hands over a letter.

LIZZY *(reads)* My dear Kitty,
You will laugh when you know where I am gone, and I cannot help laughing myself at your surprise. I am going to Gretna Green, and if you cannot guess with who, I shall think you a simpleton, for there is but one man in the world I love. I should never be happy without him, so think it no harm to be off. You need not tell anyone at Longbourn, if you do not like it, for it will make the surprise the greater, when I write to them and sign my name 'Lydia Wickham.' What a good joke it will be!
Lydia

MARY Stupid girl!

LIZZY He will never marry her – she has no money.

JANE At least the letter shows she believed they were going to be married.

HILL enters.

HILL Mr Collins, mam.

MR COLLINS enters. The women stare in horror.

MR COLLINS My cousins, Mrs Bennet *(she does not stir)*. I had hoped to meet also with your father?

JANE Our father is in London.

MR COLLINS Ah. I feel myself called upon, by my position as a clergyman, to condole with you on the grievous affliction you are now suffering under.

MARY Thank you, sir.

MR COLLINS The death of your daughter would have been a blessing in comparison to this.

MARY Indeed.

LIZZY Mary!

MR COLLINS Lady Catherine believes you are to be pitied, for as she condescendingly says: who will connect themselves with such a family? Naturally, this event has caused me to reflect with satisfaction on a certain event of last year. Cousin Elizabeth, I thank God that you declined my offer, or I would have been involved in your disgrace.

LIZZY Perhaps in light of our disgrace, you feel it would be inappropriate for you to remain here any longer.

MR COLLINS Indeed. (*smugly*) I am most sorry for you all.

MR COLLINS exits. There is silence for a moment.

MARY (*sincerely*) What an admirable man.

LIZZY Hateful man.

MARY He came to console us!

LIZZY He came to gloat, Mary.

KITTY Imagine being married to Mr Collins. He would want to read to you from Fordyce's Sermons every night before bed.

MARY (*breathlessly*) Imagine that.

HILL enters.

HILL Mr Bennet, mam.

ALL Father!

LIZZY Father, what news?

MR BENNET (*sitting wearily*) They have been found.

ALL They have!

MR BENNET They are married.

ALL Married!

MRS BENNET (*wakes up*) Married! A daughter married at only fifteen! (*joyfully*) Quick! Hill! Fetch my clothes! I must go and tell Lady Lucas and Mrs Long! (*exits*)

LIZZY How are they married? What could have induced him?

MR BENNET Money, of course. Your Uncle Gardiner must have been very generous. Wickham is a fool if he takes less than ten thousand pounds.

JANE Ten thousand pounds!

LIZZY But how can Uncle Gardiner afford such a sum?

MR BENNET I do not know. In any case, the arrangements were made at very little inconvenience to myself. Lizzy, you advised against allowing Lydia to go to Brighton. (*walks towards the door*) I should have listened. (*looks back*) And now, worst of all, we must suffer a visit from Mr and Mrs Wickham.

MR BENNET exits. The BENNET SISTERS look at each other.

A spotlight comes up on MR DARCY and MR BINGLEY.

MR BINGLEY Do you mean to tell me that Jane was in London all that time and you concealed it from me?

MR DARCY I did. I thought I was doing you a kindness but it was wrong of me. Forgive me, Bingley.

MR BINGLEY I must go back to Longbourn. I must ask her forgiveness and— and if she will be my wife. I do not care what anyone says.

MR DARCY That is just what I would hope. I pray my interference has not separated you forever. I am sorry.

MR BINGLEY puts his hand on DARCY's shoulder.

MR BINGLEY You are a good friend. I mean, it was not good of you to do that, but generally speaking... you're a good man. I do not know why you hide it from the rest of society.

MR BINGLEY exits.

Lights out.

Act II: Scene VI: Mr and Mrs Wickham & Lady Catherine

LYDIA and MR WICKHAM enter. MRS BENNET, MRS BENNET and the FOUR SISTERS wait.

MRS BENNET Lydia! Mr Wickham! My dear son! Oh, Lydia, look how you've grown!

LYDIA Well, mamma! What do you think of my husband? Is he not a charming man? I am sure my sisters must all envy me. I only hope they may have half my good luck. They must all go to Brighton. That is the place to get husbands. What a pity it is, mamma, we did not all go.

MRS BENNET But my dear Lydia, your Father says you are to go to a Northern regiment for two or three years! How will I bear it? Must it be so?

MR BENNET Yes, it must. (*glares at WICKHAM*)

LYDIA You and papa, and my sisters, must come down and see us. We shall be at Newcastle and I dare say there will be some balls. I shall get husbands for you all!

LIZZY I do not particularly like your way of getting husbands.

LIZZY exits to the garden. The lights go down on the stage. LIZZY sits down outside.

LIZZY (*to herself*) Of course Lydia, you almost ruined the family and now you want to find us husbands. Stupid girl. (*head in hands*)

LADY CATHERINE (*entering*) You have a very small garden.

LIZZY (*stands, shocked*) Lady Catherine! Why are you—?

LADY CATHERINE You can be at no loss, Miss Bennet, to understand the reason of my journey.

LIZZY Indeed, you are mistaken, Madam. I cannot account for the honour of seeing you here.

LADY CATHERINE I am not to be trifled with. A report of a most alarming nature reached me two days ago. I was informed that you, Miss Elizabeth Bennet, are to marry my own nephew, Mr. Darcy! Though I know it must be a scandalous falsehood, I instantly resolved on setting off for this place, that I might make my sentiments known.

LIZZY If you believed it impossible, I wonder you took the trouble of coming so far.

LADY CATHERINE I insist upon having such a report universally contradicted. Has my nephew made you an offer of marriage?

LIZZY Your ladyship has declared it to be impossible.

LADY CATHERINE It ought to be so, but your arts and allurements may have made him forget what he owes to his family.

LIZZY If I had, I would be the last person to confess it.

LADY CATHERINE Do not interrupt! This match, to which you have the presumption to aspire, can never take place. Mr. Darcy is engaged to my daughter. Now what have you to say?

LIZZY Only this; that if that is so, you can have no reason to suppose he will make an offer to me.

LADY CATHERINE The engagement between them is of a peculiar kind. From their infancy, they have been intended for each other. They are descended, on the maternal side, from the same noble line. And what is to divide them? The upstart pretensions of a young woman without family, connections, or fortune. If you were sensible of your own good, you would not wish to quit the sphere in which you have been brought up!

LIZZY In marrying your nephew, I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal.

LADY CATHERINE But who was your mother? Who are your uncles and aunts? Do not imagine me ignorant of their condition.

LIZZY Whatever my connections may be, if your nephew does not object to them, they can be nothing to you.

LADY CATHERINE Tell me once and for all, are you engaged to him?

LIZZY I am not.

LADY CATHERINE And will you promise me, never to enter into such an engagement?

LIZZY I will make no promise of the kind! You have insulted me in every possible way and I will return to the house. (*exits*)

LADY CATHERINE (*calling after her*) Obstinate headstrong girl! Your name will never be mentioned by any of us!

The light goes out on LADY CATHERINE. The stage lights come up. All are looking curiously as LIZZY as she enters, except MR BENNET who continues glaring at WICKHAM.

KITTY Lizzy, whose carriage was that?

LIZZY Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

MRS BENNET Lady Catherine! You see what connections we have, Mr Wickham.

MR WICKHAM Indeed, mam. But I am afraid we must depart.

MRS BENNET So soon? Oh, my dear (*holding Lydia*) You must write to us!

LYDIA Married women have no time for writing, but my sisters may write. They will have nothing better to do. Oh, to be married first, and the youngest, and my husband is so tall—

MR WICKHAM Lydia! It is time to leave.

LYDIA But my love—

MR WICKHAM Now.

MR WICKHAM exits. LYDIA pretends this exchange did not affect her.

LYDIA You see, my love is eager to start our new life together. How he loves my company. I wish you could all have been at the wedding. It was rather sad being just us, Uncle Gardiner and Mr Darcy.

LIZZY Mr Darcy? At your wedding?

LYDIA Sorry, that was a secret. Forget I said that. Goodbye Mama, Papa, sisters.

They embrace and LYDIA exits, MRS BENNET crying.

MRS BENNET My dear girl!

JANE Why did Lady Catherine come? I suppose, to tell us the Collinses were well? I suppose she had nothing particular to say to you, Lizzy?

LIZZY Exactly so. *(quietly to JANE)* I will tell you later.

MRS BENNET and KITTY are still waving.

HILL enters with MRS LONG.

HILL Mrs Long.

MRS BENNET Oh Mrs Long! My dear Lydia has left us!

MRS LONG My poor friend! I have news that will cheer you up.

MRS BENNET *(crying)* Impossible! I will never smile again without my Lydia! Married at only fifteen! Oh, friend!

MRS LONG I have just heard that Mr Bingley has returned to Netherfield.

MRS BENNET stops crying instantly.

MRS BENNET Mr Bingley? *(stands)* Jane! Go and get dressed!

JANE I am dressed.

MRS BENNET Well get dressed again! Mr Bingley is coming! *(running around madly)* Everyone! Quick! Mr Bingley has returned to Netherfield!

Act II: Scene VII: Resolution

MRS BENNET and the BENNET DAUGHTERS sit in the drawing room. HILL enters.

HILL Mr Bingley, Mam.

MRS BENNET Mr Bingley! How surprised we are to see you! Welcome!

MR BINGLEY Thank you, Mrs Bennet. I must apologise for my long absence. It has been too long. *(makes eye contact with JANE)* Far too long.

MRS BENNET Do sit down.

Everyone sits. There is an awkward silence. MR BINGLEY smiles at JANE.

MRS BENNET You know, I have just remembered I have something to do upstairs. *(stands as MR BINGLEY stands)* I will need your help Kitty and Mary.

MARY But mother, what can require our help upstairs? All the needlework is here. *(MRS BENNET winks at MARY)* Are you winking at me?

MRS BENNET Mary! Come upstairs!

MARY Very well, but everyone is behaving is very oddly.

MARY rises. She exits with KITTY and MRS BENNET. LIZZY opens a book.

MR BINGLEY Are you well, Miss Bennet?

JANE I am, thank you sir.

LIZZY Would you excuse me? I would like some fresh air.

MR BINGLEY Of course.

LIZZY exits, smiling at JANE. MR BINGLEY and JANE are alone.

MR BINGLEY I am sorry. I will never leave you again.

*MR BINGLEY gets down on one knee. The lights go down.
A spotlight comes up on MR DARCY in the garden. LIZZY bumps into him.*

MR DARCY Miss Bennet!

LIZZY Are you hiding in the bushes?

MR DARCY I am waiting for Bingley.

LIZZY You have a leaf in your hair. May I? (*LIZZY removes the leaf from his hair.*)

MR DARCY It seems I am always in disarray when I see you.

LIZZY (*beat*) Mr Darcy, I'm afraid Lydia betrayed your secret and I worked out the rest for myself. You found Lydia and Wickham in London, and you paid for everything. Am I right? (*beat*) On behalf of my family, I thank you.

MR DARCY If you will thank me, let it be for yourself alone. Much as I respect your family, I believe I thought only of you. (*beat*) You are too generous to trifle with me. If your feelings are still what they were, tell me so at once. My affections and wishes are unchanged, but one word from you will silence me on this subject for ever.

LIZZY My feelings are so different now. Mr Darcy, my dear, they are the opposite. (*beat as they take in what has happened*) Though, I do have one request.

MR DARCY Anything.

LIZZY That our visits to Rosings Park will be very infrequent.

MR DARCY (*laughing*) I am afraid my Aunt's visit had the opposite effect to the one intended. I knew if you had decided against me, you would have acknowledged it to Lady Catherine.

LIZZY Yes, you know enough of my frankness to believe me capable of that. I have criticised you so terribly.

MR DARCY What did you say to me, that I did not deserve? I have been a selfish being all my life. But by you, I was properly humbled. I came to you without a doubt of my reception. You showed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased. (*beat*) Elizabeth, marry me?

LIZZY I will.

They kiss. The lights go down. Total darkness.

MRS BENNET Three daughters married! Five thousand a year and ten thousand a year! My dear, Mr Bennet, how will I bear such happiness!

MR BENNET For God's sake, Mrs Bennet. Go to sleep.

MRS BENNET Mr Bennet?

MR BENNET Yes?

MRS BENNET I love you.

MR BENNET (*beat*) Do not make me say it.

MRS BENNET Say it.

MR BENNET I love you, Mrs Bennet! Now, go to sleep!

END.