

CHARLOTTE

32 PRIDE AND PREJUDICE ACT I

LADY LUCAS. (*Crosses to Mrs. BENNET*) Such a well-behaved young lady!

Mrs. BENNET. Yes, I like her prodigiously. She's not a bit pretty.

LADY LUCAS. I've noticed how fond you are of my Charlotte.

Mrs. BENNET. (*Actually embarrassed*) Oh, Lady Lucas—indeed you must not feel that way. Dear Charlotte is such a sensible girl.

LADY LUCAS. (*Dryly*) That means it's going to be difficult to find her a husband— (*Quietly*) You should know how little regard gentlemen have for sense in young ladies—dear Mrs. Bennet—

Mrs. BENNET. You see, I'm not much of an authority on such matters—I was married so young.

LADY LUCAS. (*Half to herself*) Yes, I know that.

Mrs. BENNET. Ah, to be young again! Mr. Bennet is not a bit romantic! Don't you think our husbands—

ELIZABETH. (*Enters R.C. from L. with CHARLOTTE. Stands just below R.C. door*) Tippling, Mama? And you, Lady Lucas? Shame on you! (*Lady Lucas steps up stage.*)

Mrs. BENNET. There's nothing in this, Lizzie. Your dear papa promised.

ELIZABETH. Then my dear papa must have been a bit absentminded when he made the mixture. It's violently potent.

Mrs. BENNET. Oh, dear Lady Lucas, perhaps we'd best not finish our cups. (*Crosses to spinet, finishing hers before she sets goblet down.*)

ELIZABETH. Your guests are awaiting you, Mama. Mrs. BENNET. Charlotte, my dear—I do hope you'll be particularly nice to Mr. Darcy.

CHARLOTTE. As nice as I may be, Mrs. Bennet. Mrs. BENNET. (*To Lady Lucas, as they go out R.C. to L.*) None of my girls can abide him!

ELIZABETH. Is it not a relief to get away from all

ACT I PRIDE AND PREJUDICE 33

those dancing derives? Will you have some of this shrub, Charlotte? (*Places fan on table C., her scarf on chair; goes to punch bowl.*)

CHARLOTTE. (*Crosses to table C.*) Mr. Bingley was saying what a good idea it was to have it away from the supper room "where a fellow could have his tipple in peace." Nice young gentleman, isn't he?

ELIZABETH. Quite charming! Jane seems to think so too. How lovely the darling looks tonight. Her eyes are like stars. I wonder if her shyness is such an asset, though?

CHARLOTTE. You fear Bingley might need encouragement?

ELIZABETH. Few men possess enough heart to be really in love without it, Charl.

CHARLOTTE. I imagine Bingley will get the needed encouragement this evening. He seems to be enjoying himself immensely.

ELIZABETH. I hope so. For myself, I call it deadly dull. All I can see is a number of brainless young men and eager young ladies prancing about awkwardly to the strains of tepid music. Do you think this sort of thing is fun, Charl? (*Crosses to chair below L. fireplace; sits.*)

CHARLOTTE. (*Crosses to chair opposite ELIZABETH; sits*) It's a means to an end. Surely, Miss Caroline Bingley is warning enough against spinsterhood.

ELIZABETH. Is a warning necessary?

CHARLOTTE. Did you notice the fair young Lydia's triumphant progress in the ballroom—right under the maternal nose too, and your mother just beamed on her.

ELIZABETH. Yes. Mama is shocked if a gentleman glimpses our ankles, but to let him understand that he may attain complete possession is perfectly proper.

CHARLOTTE. (*Rubbing her feet*) Dear me, my feet ache.

ELIZABETH. What do you think of that new man,

CHARLOTTE cont.

34 PRIDE AND PREJUDICE ACT I

Mr. Wickham? Very attractive, isn't he? (MUSIC stops.)

CHARLOTTE. (Feeling one of her slippers feet tenderly) That delectable Collins trod all over me.

ELIZABETH. But are you trying to evade my question, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE. About Wickham? I noticed Miss Bingley refused to stand up with him.

ELIZABETH. (Mocking the proper Darcy) I expect she models herself on Darcy and only stands up with members of the peerage.

CHARLOTTE. (Laughs) To be quite sincere—I feel there's something not "right" about this Wickham. (Looks searchingly at ELIZABETH) Don't waste your time, dear. Concentrate on Darcy—rich, aristocratic—

ELIZABETH. (Rises) —priggish and snobbish—

CHARLOTTE. Well, we must take what offers, my dear. When do we ever meet the knights of our dreams? Men were put into the world to teach women the law of compromise.

ELIZABETH. (Laughs; rises) Don't be ridiculous, Charlotte. (Come, we must speed the few remaining guests. (CHARLOTTE rises; goes to ELIZABETH. MUSIC starts.)

AMANDA. (Entering R.C. from L with YOUNG MAN) Oh, Miss Elizabeth!

ELIZABETH. I'm vastly sorry you are leaving, Amanda.

AMANDA. (Crosses to CHARLOTTE) It has been a truly delightful evening. Shall I see you tomorrow, Charlotte?

YOUNG MAN. We can go out this way. The carriage is near this door.

ELIZABETH. Oh, we'll see you out.

AMANDA. It was a most excellent ball.

CHARLOTTE. I saw you going down the dance hall. All the gentlemen were struck with you. (Ad lib. as

ACT I PRIDE AND PREJUDICE 35

they exit. As they go out into conservatory, DARCY comes on R.C. from L., followed by BINGLEY. DARCY crosses to up L.C.)

BINGLEY. (Enters; crosses to punch bowl; takes goblet of punch) Darcy! What are you thinking of? The evening is nearly over. You must dance. Come, be a good fellow.

DARCY. (Crosses to fireplace L.; leans on mantel) I realize that I am not contributing much to the gaiety of the assembly. But it is difficult to "be a good fellow" on such an occasion.

BINGLEY. (Crosses to R. of DARCY) But aren't any of the young ladies to your taste?

DARCY. I should call them all uncommonly pretty.

(ELIZABETH and CHARLOTTE appear in conservatory.)

BINGLEY. And Miss Jane is the prettiest of all. Really, Darcy, you're notoriously lacking in appreciation, but did you ever behold anyone more exquisitely lovely?

DARCY. If you wish me to agree with you, I shall be glad to do so.

BINGLEY. And what of her sister? She's quite pretty, too.

DARCY. Miss Elizabeth?

BINGLEY. Yes.

DARCY. She is the one above all others that I prefer to avoid.

BINGLEY. But, really—she is most agreeable.

DARCY. On the contrary, she is one of the most disagreeable young women I have ever had the ill-luck to encounter.

BINGLEY. Shame on you, Darcy. (Takes him by the arm) She is a delightful girl. Find out for yourself.

DARCY. (Submitting and going toward R.C. door with BINGLEY. BINGLEY places empty glass on table

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